

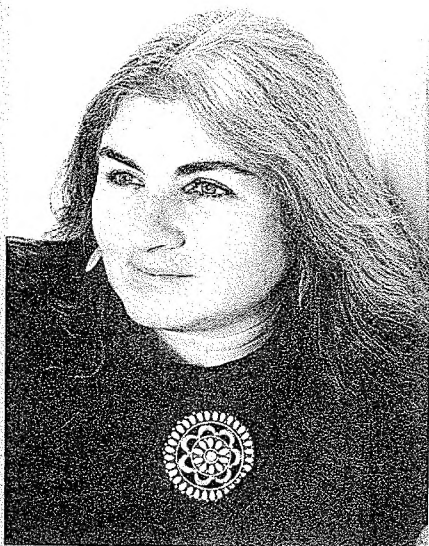
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HERESIES 21

FOOD IS A FEMINIST ISSUE

a feminist publication on art & politics



COLLEEN MCKAY

MARGARET RANDALL ORDERED DEPORTED

Margaret Randall is a poet who has contributed frequently to *Heresies* and to leading literary and political journals. Unaware of the consequences she would suffer later, she gave up her American citizenship in the 1960s and applied for Mexican citizenship so she could live and work in Mexico while raising her children. She spent fifteen years there and lived in Cuba and Nicaragua as well before returning to the U.S. Throughout her writing career she has expressed views on racism, sexism, and foreign policy that the Reagan administration finds inimical to its policies. A few years ago she came back to the United States to be with her family and to teach at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, at which time she tried to reassume her US citizenship. On August 28, 1986, Immigration Judge Martin Spiegel ruled that Margaret Randall would not be permitted to remain in the U.S. because, in his judgment, her writings "advocate the economic, international, and government doctrines of world communism." This charge is a statutory basis for exclusion under the McCarran-Walter Act, passed in 1952 at the height of the McCarthy era. Judge Spiegel gave Randall until December 1, 1986 to leave the country. In February 1987, an appeal of his decision was made to the Board of Immigration, and her case is also being brought before a Federal District Court. Joining her as plaintiffs in the federal case are the PEN American Center and several prominent writers, including Kurt Vonnegut and Alice Walker. Margaret Randall is permitted to remain in this country pending the appeal decision, expected some time in April. Funds are urgently needed to fight this case. Donations should be made to the Margaret Randall Defense Committee, 123 Yale SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106, or to the Center for Constitutional Rights, 666 Broadway, 7th floor, New York, NY 10012.

SPECIAL DONATIONS The *Heresies* Collective is grateful to all our contributors. We want to especially thank these contributors of \$25 and more: Catherine Hillenbrand, Joyce Kozloff, Vivien Leone, Louise McCagg, Norma Munn, Jim Murray, Anne Pitrone, and May Stevens.

Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art & Politics is published two times a year by Heresies Collective, Inc., c/o Foundation for the Community of Artists, 280 Broadway, Suite 412, New York, NY 10007. Subscription rates: \$15 for four issues, \$24 for institutions. Outside the U.S. and Canada add \$2 postage. Single copies: \$5.50 each. Address all correspondence to: Heresies, PO Box 1306, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013. *Heresies*, ISSN 0146-3411. Vol. 6, No. 1, Issue 21. ©1987, Heresies Collective, Inc. All rights reserved.

We are also very grateful to the excellent organizers and producers of our inspiring benefit performance night on December 12, 1986: Jerri Allyn (who ran the show), Marty Pottenger (who helped her run the show), and Lori Seid (who made sure all the machines picked up their cues).

This publication is made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funds provided by New York Community Trust and Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines. *Heresies* is indexed by the Alternative Press Centre, Box 7229, Baltimore, MD 21218. It is a member of COSMEP (Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers), Box 703, San Francisco, CA 94101.

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HERESIES

A FEMINIST PUBLICATION ON ART AND POLITICS

Heresies is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact and that in the making of art and all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role. We hope that Heresies will stimulate dialogue around radical political and aesthetic theory, as well as generate new creative energies among women. It will be a place where diversity can be articulated. We are committed to broadening the definition and function of art.

Heresies is published by a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, marxists, lesbian feminists, or anarchists; our fields include painting, sculpture, writing, anthropology, literature, performance, art history, architecture, filmmaking, photography, and video. While the themes of the individual issues will be determined by the collective, each issue will have a different editorial staff, composed of members of the mother collective and other women interested in that theme. Heresies provides experience for women who work editorially, in design, and in production. An open evaluation meeting will be held after the appearance of each issue. Heresies will try to be accountable to and in touch with the international feminist community.

As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts, and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified, they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience, and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. As a step toward the demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of criticism to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women. We are not committed to any particular style or aesthetic, nor to the competitive mentality that pervades the art world. Our view of feminism is one of process and change, and we feel that in the process of this dialogue we can foster a change in the meaning of art.

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ISSUE 21

FOOD IS A FEMINIST ISSUE

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Kathie Brown and Morgan Gwenwald

PRODUCTION

Bendel Hydes, Gail Bradney, C. C. Kinsman, Robin Michals
Thanks to all our proofreading volunteers!

Printed by Wickersham Printing, Lancaster, PA.



VINE RIPENED

UPCOMING ISSUES

ART IN UNESTABLISHED CHANNELS

Feminism has redefined traditional notions of community, generated new communities, and continues to question the limitation of the art community as it stands. We'd like to know about public, collaborative, and performance art that takes place in a geographic community, such as a neighborhood, as well as work generated by any community of alternative voices. We invite work that challenges the art market's categories of professional and nonprofessional, consumer and producer, public and private, from a women's point of view.

COMING OF AGE

Aging exemplifies change—the deepest form of radical process. We leave behind, but we also arrive. We come of age in unexpected ways, repeatedly, not only individually, but communally and culturally. Between the generations there are alliances, conflicts, and all forms of objectification. As individuals, we come of age physically, psychologically, politically, with the birth of a child, the death of a parent, the enlightenment of experience, the shedding of beliefs. What are the joys and anxieties of each phase of our coming of age?

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Each issue of HERESIES has a specific theme and all material submitted to a particular issue must relate to its theme. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced and submitted in duplicate. Visual material should be submitted in the form of a slide, xerox, or photograph with title, medium, and date noted; however, HERESIES must have a black-and-white photograph or equivalent to publish the work. We will not be responsible for original art. Those submitting either written or visual material must accompany their contribution with a two or three line biography. All material *must* be accompanied by a stamped, self-

The editorial collective for HERESIES 20 would like to note two corrections to that issue: the photo on page 60 of the article on Greenham Common should have been credited to Joanne O'Brien; Jenny Dixon is the current, not the former, director of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

10TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

What is feminist art? The 10th Anniversary collective is soliciting page art and cartoons on this subject. Surprise award for the best definition of feminist art. Submit to Heresies by July 1, 1987 (address below)

MYTH-EDUCATED WOMAN

How has school changed your life? Why do so many women study art (and so many men end up showing, publishing, performing? Do you have to go to school to make it? What's it like being the only woman teacher, student, married woman, mother in your class? Did you ever have an influential woman professor? What about education in general?

addressed envelope in order for it to be returned. We do not publish reviews or monographs on contemporary women. We do not commission articles and cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. HERESIES pays a small fee for published material. Send all submissions to: HERESIES, PO Box 1306, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.

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HERESIES

A FEMINIST PUBLICATION ON ART AND POLITICS

PO Box 1306 • Canal Street Station • New York, New York 10013

Food for Thought

FOOD is necessary for human survival. But it's much more than that, for food is a primary pleasure. Social bonding and celebration take place around food. For women, in particular, our relationship to food is a very personal one. At the most fundamental level, human life depends on a woman for its very being. A woman's body feeds the unborn child. Her breast milk provides the infant's first food outside of the womb and contains antibodies, the child's first medicine. An infant's primary instinct is to survive; its first wail a calling out for food. Food, then, is at the heart of language and the first medium of exchange a child discovers.

As the original providers of food, women are sustainers of life and continue that role as cooks, smart shoppers, waitresses, health care professionals, social workers, market sellers, and small farmers. But since a woman's individual power—the power to control her own conditions and the conditions of her children—has been taken out of her hands, issues related to feeding and nurturing have moved out of the personal, and into the political realm.

In the beginning, they say, Eve ate that tempting apple. And where did it get her? Eve gained knowledge, yes, but she would now have to suffer pain in childbirth. Her hunger caused humans to become mortal and ashamed, so the story goes. But the most important consequence of her ravenous appetite is that Eve lost her autonomy—man would rule over woman, and her desires would now be subject to her husband's.

The Adam and Eve story symbolizes what has happened to women on a larger scale. Meeting women's needs is now contingent on the will of patriarchal religious and economic powers; these powers have stepped into the role of husband to make decisions affecting our own, and our children's, well-being. The loss of women's independence has had far-reaching effects.

Women are still expected to provide and/or prepare the family's food even though we're not given the resources and power to do so on our own. And industrialists and advertisers prey on women by offering us food that is more visually appealing, but less nutritious, giving us a false sense that we have options. The many foods available on the market divert women's attention away from how very little real, significant choice we have about our lives, about our world.

A woman's body and her relationship to food is a paradigm for the use and control of food in the world. Just as food, a powerful tool, is used as punishment or

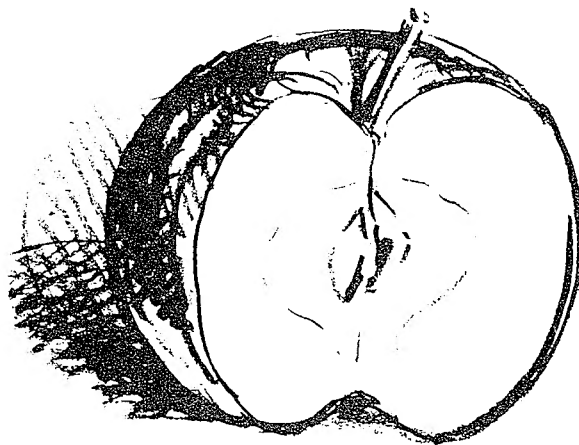
reward within families (eat your spinach or you won't get dessert), on a larger scale, food policies are used as potent political weapons between and within nations. In the third world, women do more than consume food; they also produce the majority of the food in those countries. Yet these women have little control over its distribution and are thus impoverished as a direct result of their lack of power. Traditionally the last to eat, third world women get the least food, or are prohibited through food taboos from eating some of the most desirable (and nutritious) foods.

Those with less power come to be viewed as somehow less than human. The predominant male attitude toward women is that we are objects, just like other products. In the not-too-distant past, women were seen as something to be devoured, which is apparent in male cannibalistic language—the analogous use of such words as tomato, peach and cupcake to describe women and the metaphorical meanings behind such tradi-

tions as a woman popping out of a cake at a stag party. Being viewed as succulent, juicy and luscious has affected how we see ourselves. In the last two decades or so, our packaging has changed somewhat, but women are still seen as commodities. Now, especially in affluent cultures, to be thin (read "ideal") is to be desirable. Hence, many of us are obsessed with our body size. Through our refusal or overconsumption of food, women get caught in cycles of meeting or defying societal standards. Anorexia, bulimia, and overeating are reactions to political situations that have become trivialized as personal ones. Our striving to conform to the ideal body size diverts women's attention, energy, and thinking away from considering social and political action.

Central to each of these issues is how food and feeding are manipulated by others and how women's power to nurture has been taken out of our hands. These are personal and political concerns. For women, issues relating to food can and must fuel feminist sensibilities. ■

—GB for the Heresies 21 collective



From sharing "otherness" by having to eat at sex-segregated tables to trading favorite recipes, women from every culture have always formed bonds around food and feeding. Each member of the Heresies 21 collective had her own reasons for wanting to take part in putting together an issue about food and feminism. Feminism grows from the principle that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men. But the movement has blossomed because women who believed in these rights sought the support and companionship of others who shared their dreams. One of our fellow collective members reminded us that even companionship derives from food: the root meanings of the word "companion" are "together," from the Latin com, and "bread," from panis. Thus, a companion is one with whom we share our bread, the bread of life.

GROWING

by Bea Kreloff

Born september 11, 1925 brooklyn new york weight 12 pounds
a gorgeous baby round dimples creases fat adorable cuddly
desirable admired fat

Age 6 they? keep telling momma don t worry celia its only baby fat
she ll grow out of it eleanor my younger sister is little
and skinny a lousy eater i help my mother amuse and coerce her to
eat all the foods i wasn t allowed
potato kugel noodles knishes ice cream malteds cookies candy
when momma isn t looking i sneak the food off her plate
she doesn t snitch as
number one she is afraid of her big fat sister and
number two it means she doesn t have to eat it
i hate her
god i love to eat
momma puts me on a diet as i enter first grade

Age 10 fat fat the water rat
fifty bullets in your hat
my first girdle with steel bones
i ll show them
i m the best artist i have the best handwriting
i have a fresh mouth and i talk all the time
i m funny and i can dance like a gazelle
fat people are light on their feet
i get C in conduct and have to sit in the boys section
for the rest of the term
i am dark and greasy looking and my hair is oily and hangs
like straight wet noodles no fat juicy curls like shirley temple
my uncle louie says i bring down real estate values when i
go out to play
i am still fat

Age 13 i march on brighton beach avenue the girdle making holes in
my waistline shouting we must not go to war we must not play
into the capitalists hands not even against hitler
my parents are hysterical
the party advocates free love i don t have anyone to try it
with no one wants me even for free because
i am fat
poppa is a coat and suit designer disappointed that i can t wear
a sample size somewhat resigned he makes big clothes to order
for me momma is sure i will never get married
i am too fat
look how lucky you are you have such a god given talent
she says trying to soften the prediction as i spend every
weekend painting because i don t have any dates i take my
friend frances who is seventeen five feet tall and 110 pounds
to the movies for the kids under twelve price she needs an
adult to get into the movies as a minor and i look like i
could be her mother

Age 16 mrs avery my english teacher invites me to tea at her house
on gramercy park says bea you are going to be such a handsome
woman at thirty five
shit what about now i don t care what i ll look like then i ll
be old i want to be a pretty young slim thing it ll never happen
nobody will love me nobody loves
a fat girl



UP FAT IN

Age 18 my boy friend bernie is real skinny momma loves him she makes all the fattening foods she shouldn't eat poppa shouldn't eat geshie my brother shouldn't eat and i shouldn't eat we are all fat except eleanor the fink i marry bernie the following year because momma is in love with him and i'm in love with momma he loves both of us he's got two fat mommas i lost 25 pounds for my wedding my gown didn't fit when i bought it i barely get into it on my wedding day i don't want to get married but i'm afraid to disappoint momma momma momma dies six months after i get married i eat and eat and i'm fatter than i have ever been i am twenty years old i weigh 235 pounds my life is over

Age 21 the war is over i'm living in momma's house with poppa geshie eleanor and bernie playing momma poppa call me celia most of the time and i learn to cook like momma real good gefilte fish borscht chicken soup with knadlach potato kugel blintzes a good jewish housewife geshie commits himself to creedmoor trying to retreat from pain and life to withdrawal he's very fat i've got to get out of my mother's house i eat and stay fat

Age 25 all my girlfriends are having babies and moving out to long island i'm pregnant but i'm not moving out of brooklyn i feel great a real woman my fat acceptable in pregnancy i'm painting again it's a boy the euphoria dies now i'm really locked in in my body in motherhood between chores i cook great meals feeding my frustration depression and boredom i'm getting fatter

Age 31 two boys now unhappy in brooklyn busy with school politics civil rights stirrings predicting movement and change i don't stop eating i don't lose weight i visit geshie every other week at creedmoor and i think maybe we should have adjoining rooms

Age 36 took the boys to summer camp working as arts and crafts counsellor in obsessive love with the drama counsellor she has two boys too and is fat we are inseparable for six years neither one of us leaves home or husbands or children we diet together at weight watchers i lose 80 pounds and my lover to another woman in therapy i find out rita was me and i was momma being to her what i wanted momma to be for me i start to paint again no more big important abstract expressionism instead lots of alienated despairing people we bus in the kids from bed stuy to p.s. 119 in flatbush and start block busting the neighborhood

AMERICA

Age 42 alone in europe for two months i leave the boys in camp
leave bernie the first time on a plane the first time really
alone they invented europe just so i could be here now
nobody knew i was bernie s wife elliot and charles mother
poppa s daughter rita s ex lover momma s daughter painter
housewife i could be anybody and
not very fat
i come home reluctantly and start marching without the
steel boned girdle against the vietnam war changed

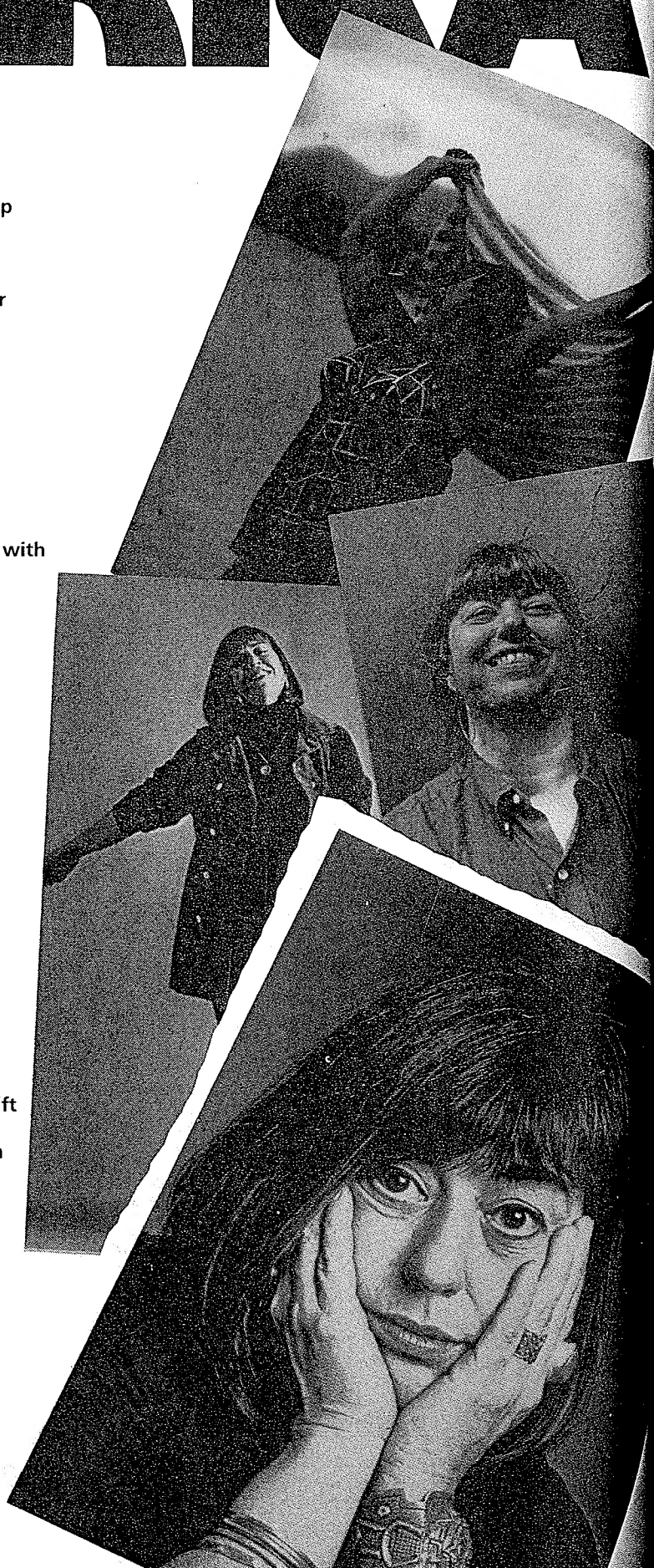
Age 45 bernie overhears me talking to my lover on the phone
tells elliot about me and i tell bernie to leave
free at last momma i did it for you and it s taken twenty
five years and tons of food i live in greenwich village
fat again and happy

Age 49 momma died at Age 50 being with bernice is like being with
bernie still the jewish housewife and mother if i stay i
will die at 50 like momma my friend jimmy says that
bernice and i look like bookends two fat middle aged
ladies feeding our faces bernice tries to teach me not
to care so much about how i look
in love with a stunning feminist doctor i think hey
momma you always wanted your daughter to marry a
jewish doctor feminism is taking hold
my conversion is absolute being fat is no disgrace and
women are changing the world

Age 55 i stop painting teaching art in a private high school
the only faculty member with no undergraduate degrees
head of the department lots of instant gratification
poppa is dead eleanor has two daughters geshie commits
suicide the ultimate withdrawal my son charles is loving
and caring my son elliot is lost
i live with a wonderful beautiful woman painter who eats
a lot and stays slim remember slim svelte willowy i have
to be dead six months before i d be slim svelte willowy
six years of fat consciousness and six years of feminist
consciousness shifting off my fat focus center not totally
i don t stop eating

Age 60 i m alive ten years longer than momma every day is a gift
the celebration by my two thousand friends and their
friends at the limelight is a benefit for kitchen table women
of color press it s a blast
the fat is so integrated i work around it and look fine
people who get to know me always think i ve lost weight
they ve gotten past my bulk to me
i can live with who i am the skinny blond blue eyed
long legged elegant wasp no longer lives inside struggling
to get out she s gone rendered down in years of chicken
soup and radical politics
momma i miss you look at me now my fat is you a warm
protective coating keeping you with me always
i m alive happier than i ve ever been
so i m fat

Bea Kreloff writes: "I figure painting for
myself for 40 years is enough; now I make
art with whatever happens to me."



COCK AU VIN
Select a Fine COCK

CUT IN SMALL PIECES

BROWN
3/4 C^o PORK FAT

IN

5 tbsps. butter

BROWN 6 shallots + 2 CARROTS sliced thin

Remove Vegetables and PORK FAT
BROWN COCK ON high heat
Heat 3 tbsps. good BRANDY

add 1 tbsps. FLOUR
1 CRUSHED garlic
STIR FOR 3 min. with WOODEN SPOON
put in ONE C^o good white wine put back vegetables plus 1 C^o
sliced thin mushrooms HEAT 15 min. high FLAME uncovered
SERVE & IMMEDIATELY

FROM: A.B. COCKLESS TALK BOOK

RECIPE #2
NE 69

Martha Edelheit, A.B. Cockless Talkbook, ink and watercolor on ricepaper.

Martha Edelheit is a painter, sculptor, and filmmaker. She lives and works in NYC.

SCOTT HIDE

HERE SHE COMES, MYTH CALIFORNIA

by Nikki Craft



*Ann Simonton
in Bologna Dress*

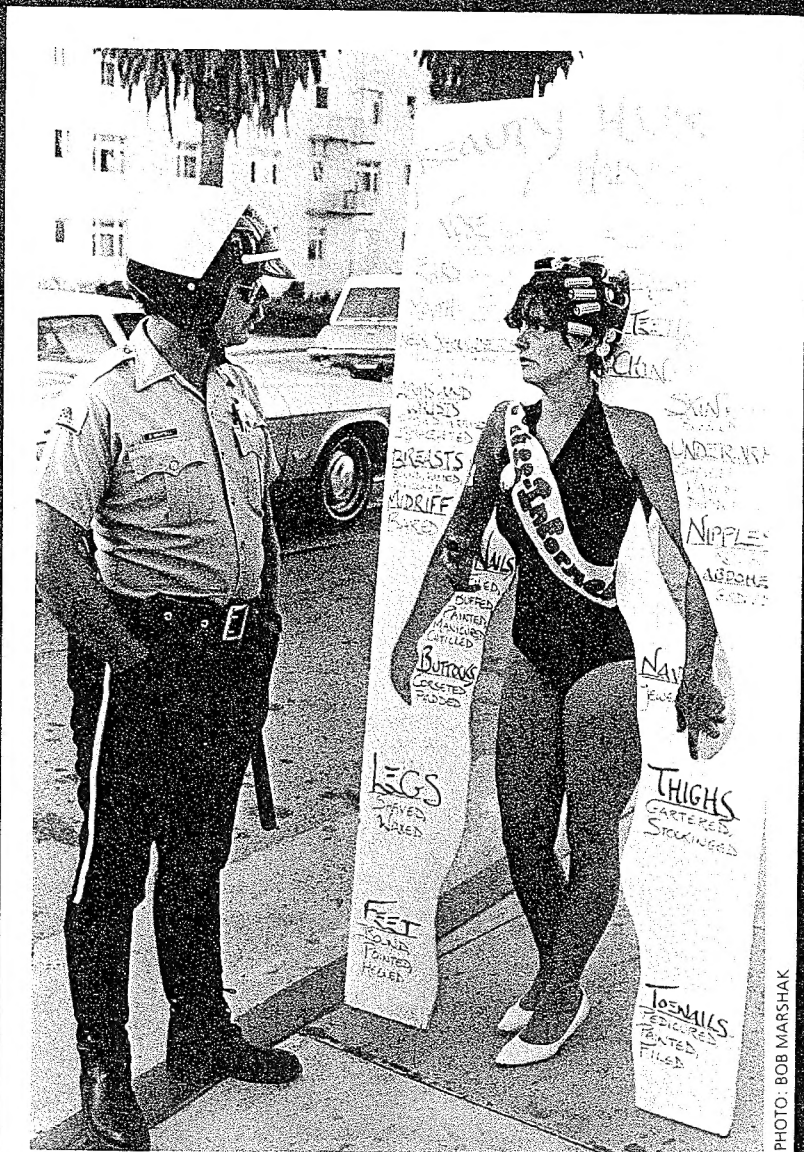
QUESTION THE TYRANNY OF SLENDERNESS

The beauty ideal uses and exploits the female body for men's profit and entertainment. Our culture's standard of beauty is a myth and a lie and encourages weight slavery. It perpetuates the not-so-pretty side of the obsession with slenderness: bingeing, vomiting, starvation; amphetamine, diuretic, and laxative addiction.

The Myth California Pageant is drawing attention to the unreal and artificial sexist images of women. The sweet, white all-American tradition, as represented in the Miss California Pageant, is not an accurate reflection of our true diversity. The Miss California contest reinforces the objectification of women, making the rapist mentality in our culture possible and permissible. It is our belief that this beauty pageant blatantly perpetuates the myth of women as passive sexual objects.

The Miss California Pageant family continues to deny that this is actually a beauty contest. They claim instead that it is a scholarship foundation. If it is, where are the women over 25 years old? Where are the women of color? The physically disabled women? Women who do not have ideal measurements, the Clairol hair, or Maybelline eyes? Are these women not worthy of a "scholarship?"

Nikki Craft is a political activist using nudity, art and civil disobedience to confront issues of women's rights. Currently living in Oshkosh, WI, she travels the country urging women to break laws that discriminate against them. Arrested 43 times, she remains incorrigible and unrehabilitated.



Nikki Craft with Policeman

PHOTO: BOB MARSHAK

At the weight slavery protest we had women, wearing spiked high heels, jumping through hula hoops labeled Beauty Obedience School as they dragged bathroom scales on chains from their ankles.

1000 protesters disrupt Miss California pageant

By MATT SPEISER

As a 300-pound woman dressed in a shocking pink bikini cheered on a crowd of protesters outside, a 24-year-old blonde from West Los Angeles was named Miss California Monday night before a sequined audience at the Santa Cruz Civic auditorium.

In addition to the naming of Donna Grace Cherry as the state's entrant to the Miss America pageant, Deirdre Hamilton, Miss Tulare, was declared the first runner-up. They will receive \$6,000 and \$2,500 scholarships, respectively.

The crowning of Miss California, however, was partially upstaged Monday by the activities of feminist protesters outside, who held their annual Myth California demonstra-

tion on adjacent Church Street. As the tuxedoed and gowned participants arrived for the pageant, nearly 1,000 protesters lined the street, chanting "No more profits off of women's bodies."

While the festivities inside the auditorium were televised throughout the state, none of the activities of the protesters made the airwaves. Even when three demonstrators jumped on the Civic's stage near the conclusion of the event, the television cameras turned the other way and the show was quickly concluded.

Three men, dressed in the acceptable attire of the evening, jumped on the stage just as Miss Cherry was being crowned and yelled, "Men Resist Sexism." After participants on stage realized what was happening, the trio was escorted off stage. The television producers were quicker on the

draw, immediately pulling their cameras back when the commotion began. The names of the three men have been referred to the district attorney's office for possible prosecution.

One arrest came from the evening's events. A woman who tried to enter the contest without a ticket was arrested for trespassing.

The annual feminist protests have been growing in size and intensity since their inception four years ago. In 1982, the protest featured a woman dressed in 35 pounds of cold cuts, sashed "Miss Steak," who said, "judge meat, not women." In 1983, women shackled by bathroom scales leaped through hula hoops labeled Beauty Obedience School.

This year the centerpiece of a three-vehicle parade was the striking profile of 32-year-old Susan Dubin, who sat atop a convertible wearing a size 54 pink bikini. She is founder of the Santa Cruz-Monterey Bay chapter of the National Association to Aid Fat Americans.

"Americans have this cultural obsession with weight," Ms. Dubin

said. "We're saying intelligent and creative people come in all sizes and shapes. That's the point of my bikini—to show people that I radiate self-assurance and self-respect."

The demonstration also featured the Berkeley group Ladies Against Women, a four-member satirical tribe dressed in excessively traditional garb. They sarcastically call for a return to "American values."

"If God hadn't wanted women to look like Barbie dolls, he wouldn't have given us padded bras and cosmetic surgery," said one.

At times the camp dress of the demonstrators was so close to the fashions they were mimicking, it was difficult to tell the protesters and pageant participants apart.

The participants, however, were the ones with the long faces. Most of those arriving for the pageant seemed stunned and disgusted by the protesters.

One booster of Miss Tulare described the protesters as "slums of the earth."

Ervin Schapansky said, "This pageant is 63 years old. If there were something wrong with it, it wouldn't be here."

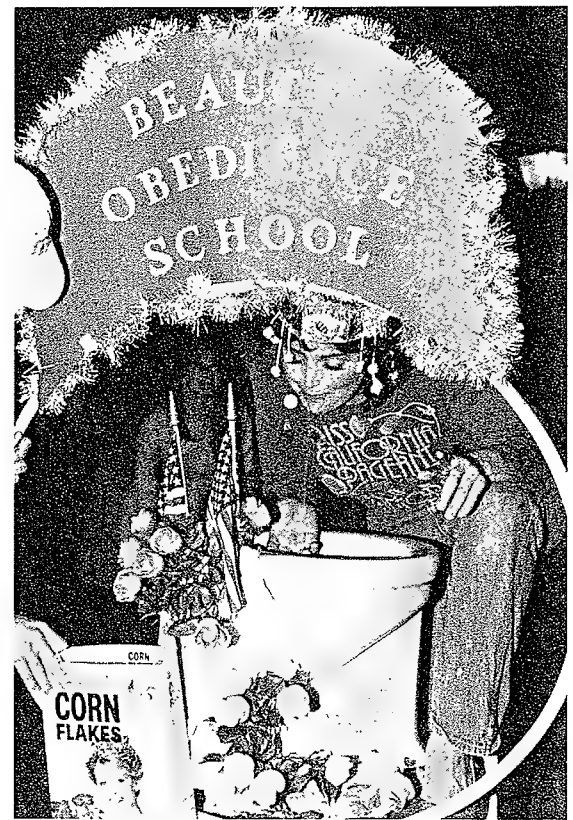


PHOTO: DON FUKUDA



Susan Dubin

PHOTO: KURT ELLISON

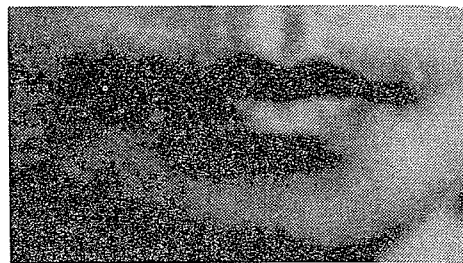
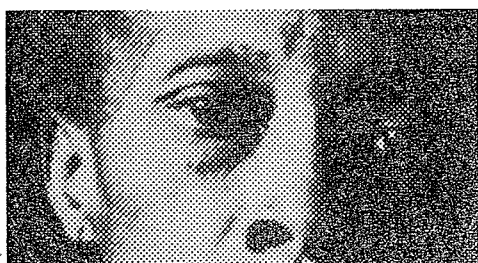
Reprinted with permission from the SAN JOSE TIMES.

The men had succeeded in spearing and killing a kangaroo. They were out in a men's hunting group, a trek they made nearly every day. Two of them dug a hole and lit a fire; the kangaroo was singed to remove its fur and gutted, its organ fat eaten up on the spot, and the carcass cooked whole in the pit oven for almost an hour. The liver that all relished was eaten first. Then the men divided up the kangaroo among themselves according to the rules: the hind legs one by one, the mammary glands, the tail, the undigested grass in the stomach, two slabs of ribs with vertebrae, the front legs; the successful hunter Namjikwara was given his prize, the head and neck. The men ate the entire kangaroo and rested until dark, when they began to dance and sing.

The women were out together that day as always, at least those women were whose babies were old enough to leave be-

hind with the older children. The women hunted for plants and small animals in the scrubby forest and by the stream. They dug up wild yams, roots, and rhizomes to take back to camp but picked ripe figs for themselves when they found a ready tree. One of the women spotted a bandicoot and pinned it inside a fallen hollow log. They teased it out with prodding sticks. It tried to escape, but W. caught its tail as it went past and smashed its head against a tree. They cooked it only after they got back to camp. It was a lucky day.

When the men finally arrived home, their wives greeted them with the plant food they'd gathered and cooked that day, but the men were no longer very hungry. The men would have given the little that was left of the kangaroo to the women and children—if there'd been any left.¹



Being women, eat crumbs

A Siberian admonition

THINKING ABOUT FOOD PROHIBITIONS / by KATHIE BROWN

THOSE ABORIGINAL WOMEN lagged behind the men of their band in weight for height; a 5' woman weighed, on average, 89 pounds. Once they began to lactate on the birth of their first baby, going from an underfed childhood to motherhood between 15 and 17, the women gave milk almost unceasingly—either pregnant and nursing or just nursing. So they were old women by 35 and no longer bore children. Their flesh, the belly and breast, hung in sagging folds with little subcutaneous fat tissue to bind it to the muscle.

Yet, in the value of their contribution to the band's subsistence, the women were as important as the men. The aboriginal Australians divided the world of food into two domains, animal food (*kuka*)—identified with the spiritual—and plant food (*mirka*, which included insects and some small animals)—identified with the physical. The classes *kuka* and *mirka* were assigned to men and women, respectively, and both realms were judged necessary to life. However, the men benefited more from their half of the world; they could claim a share of the women's gathering, which yielded a steady and predictable supply, but weren't obligated to give the women an equal share of their more haphazardly won hunting catches.

This pattern, of women and children being the last fed, of food prohibitions, of men monopolizing animal protein sources, is found all over the world.² And, if a group has not formulated outright taboos (which may be loosely defined as prohibitions

linked to some cosmic punishment), it may still reserve the culture's favorite food for men. Men and women may eat separately, which abets an unequal allotment of favored foods.

Such taboos, anthropologist Caroline Humphrey writes, "... do not mean that women appear socially paralyzed in everyday life. To the casual observer it would be difficult to tell that the prohibitions exist, and s/he might simply note that women seem to have their own way of doing things. ... If one act is forbidden, people do something else."³

Food taboos are allied to fears of pollution, to men's anxiety that women's unclean ritual state will infect the food the women cook for their male relatives. Women are especially dangerous during their menstrual periods, which let loose the double contagions of infertility and blood.

In small-scale societies, these food taboos often appear in concert with totemic, or clan, systems. The clan's relationship to the totemic plant or animal varies; clan members may have a duty to eat it ritually (although never day to day), they may be forbidden to eat it, or blood members may eat the totemic food themselves but forbid it to exogamous husbands or wives.⁴ The whole society often holds the clan responsible for the abundance of the clan's totemic animal or plant and views food taboos as vital to insuring a plentiful supply for all.

The question that the commonness of food prohibitions poses for feminists is why so many societies reserve less food

for women than for men. And, by extension, why wives must eat after their husbands and male relatives. Why is a woman deprived, considering that her need for nourishment is so great, with a baby to nurse and another in the womb, over and over, until her body is literally eaten up? These aspects of women's half-lives leave us with the same numbing puzzlement that racism leaves in the minds of people of color: why us? What about us matters so much?

These pointedly feminist questions are complicated by the mystery of food avoidances in general, by examples of a people's preferences leading to starvation—in Bengal, in 1943, great numbers died because they would not accept imported wheat as a substitute for the failed rice crop.⁵ Why do appetite and taste exist at all if they can be so life-threatening? There is an "ideology of food" as there are ideologies of sex, death, and social status.

Food preferences and avoidances have a biological background; we know that other animals also prefer some foods to others, avoid some nutritionally sound foods, and will starve rather than violate their taste preferences. Some say that's just "instinct," despite the fact that animals can learn to love new foods. Humans built on inherited taste preferences*—probably for flesh, insects, and sweet fruit, if other primates are a guide—to create social ideologies of taste. The technologies of gardening, cooking, and fermentation come out of this cultural process. Human food preferences, however, are not just matters of biologically inherited tastes. For instance, Nuer pastoralists scorn wild animals, preferring to eat their cattle, although they live surrounded by easily hunted large game. People living in elaborate totemic systems, in which the totem animals are forbidden to the totem clans, see near neighbors in opposite clans relishing the very food they are never to eat.

Three strands of socially based explanations have been used to explore such questions. First, the materialist and functionalist thread, which says that food prohibitions represent unsystematic, commonsense science or serve some overtly practical purpose; second, the sociological or structuralist strand, which interprets the prohibitions as actors in a symbolic system or as symbols that demarcate or protect significant social boundaries; and, third, the socio-economic explanations, that believe taboos are rationalizing or mediating symbols of socio-economic realities.

I have chosen not to explore psychoanalytic theories in this article because of the varying and particular content of food prohibitions. To explain the choice of prohibitions in psychoanalytic terms would throw me into examining food taboos on a case-by-case basis; I would then have to explain how the "universal" principles of psychic life had made their mark on a cultural practice, had intruded into the social and economic realms and become institutionalized. Food taboos may indeed have a psychic background but seem to operate in the cultural foreground to such an extent that I think they should be dealt with as social products.⁶

To be helpful, an explanation must tell us what functions food taboos serve and why the prohibitions apply to some people and not to others. A materialist like myself wants to find culture's sources in biology, ethnology, psychology, sociology, or political economics—no conspiracies, no supernatural agents. But that stipulation does not mean I have to confine my thinking to the functionalist level. Thoughts and symbols are, somehow, "real things" and instrumental in human life. At the least, they persuade people to go along with situations that are plainly unfair by embedding reality in ideology.

The medical materialist theory—that of commonsense science—has been around for centuries. A paradigmatic food

avoidance is pork's prohibition to Jews and Moslems; thinkers since Maimonides have asked, isn't this just a recognition that pigs carry disease, are unclean? This hypothesis can be criticized in many ways: the Abominations of Leviticus, the key Jewish text, mentions many forbidden foods as various as camels, hyrax, rock badgers, eagles, and snakes; trichinosis was not really diagnosed as a disease until the nineteenth century because of its variable expression; other domestic animals, including cattle and sheep, carry dangerous parasites and diseases; and trichinosis parasites are killed by most cooking techniques.⁷

Food prohibitions aimed only at women are even harder to justify as folk knowledge, because there are no "facts" that lend a scientific air to such rules in the way that the pig's frequent infestations seem to support banning that food. The most important fact in this case is that poor nutrition contributes directly to infant and maternal death, and the loss of wives and babies is not a social good. (But we must separate the realities of mortality at birth and in infancy from female infanticide, which is aimed at killing a class of infants to "aid" the group.)

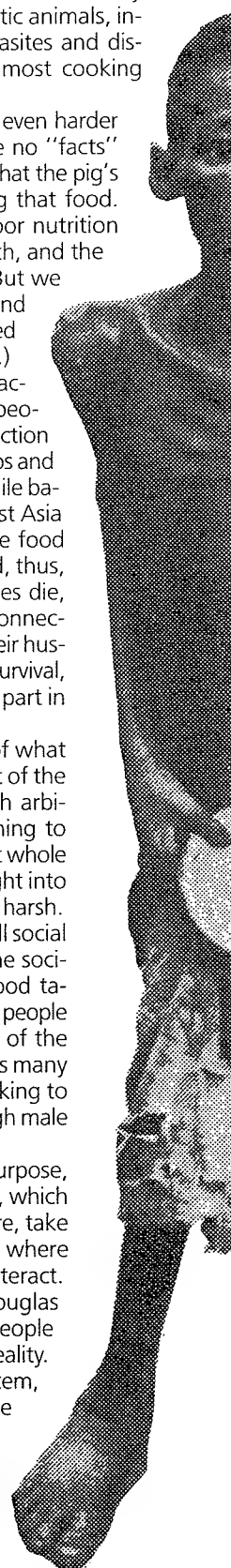
A key question whenever an established practice is explained as folk wisdom is whether the people who follow the practice recognize a connection between two events—here, between food taboos and their possible outcome: lower birthweights, fragile babies, and higher maternal mortality. In Southeast Asia women do make a connection; they credit the food avoidances with giving them smaller babies and, thus, easier deliveries. But many of the smaller babies die, and surely the women must also recognize a connection between birthweight and survival. Surely their husbands, who also have a stake in their children's survival, would come to see a connection. Yet they take part in enforcing the taboos.

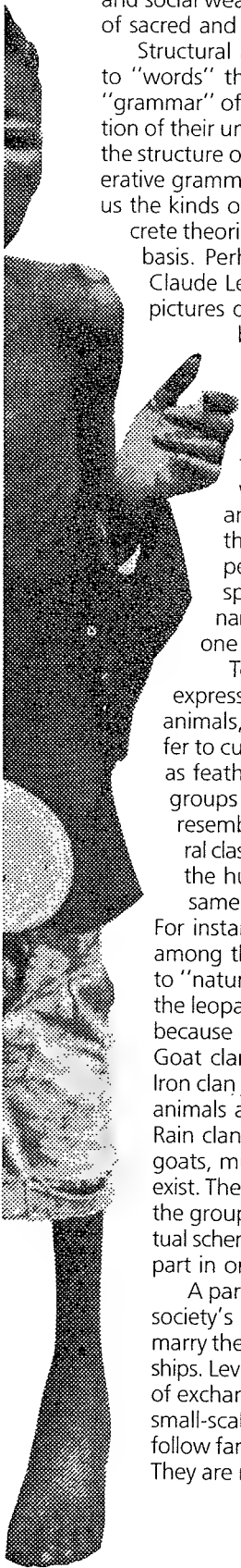
Of course, folk science could be made up of what we call "old wives" tales, which would relieve it of the burden of being true. But then we're left with arbitrary rules and unexplained victims, with nothing to invoke but "ignorance," "superstition," and that whole strain of ethnocentrism. We would gain no insight into why the penalties for breaking the rules are so harsh.

Functionalist anthropological theories see all social practices as directly performing some action the society needs done. What could discriminatory food taboos be doing for a society except keeping some people fed at the expense of others' hunger? In light of the fact that, in most of the world, women spend as many calories working as men do, taboos aren't working to funnel food to those who most need it—although male anthropologists have often made that case.

If taboos don't serve a simple practical purpose, what do they do? The sociological explanations, which look for the sources of culture in social structure, take us to a deeper level of existence—the place where subjects, objects, and the symbolic process interact. From Durkheim to Levi-Strauss and Mary Douglas runs a set of themes and variations on how people project pictures of their social structure onto reality. The whole round of law, myth, ritual, clan, totem, and taboo comes out of a group's picture of the universe; each element is one symbolic set in a coherent intellectual structure, and each set works out its meaning in concrete action.

Durkheim, one of the founders of this





sociological anthropology, set out to understand the source of religious feeling. He said that a social group formed an awareness of itself and its power, out of which flowed totem and taboo, explanatory myths and affirming rituals. The dangerous powers of God were those of society itself and its punishments. Durkheim draws food taboos into the holy circle, where they act as acolytes of women's social obligations, social strengths, and social weaknesses. The prohibitions mark the boundaries of sacred and profane powers.

Structural anthropologists have likened cultural practices to "words" that are connected to one another by a formal "grammar" of relationships derived from a people's construction of their universe. Certain habits of mind are embedded in the structure of the human brain (cf. Chomsky's idea of a generative grammar⁸). Such abstruse theories don't give most of us the kinds of easy-to-master thinking tools that more concrete theories give us, but they cannot be dismissed on that basis. Perhaps the most influential of these theorists is Claude Levi-Strauss, who thinks humans construct their pictures of the world out of oppositions, actual or symbolic, they find in many areas of life.

Levi-Strauss sees a basic opposition to be of nature against culture; human cosmological theories are bent on understanding how we become people, not animals. From "primitive" peoples' acute observations of natural diversity comes the idea of meaningful differences and of classification into groups or species. And this classification of nature flows into the idea that people's family groups have analogies to natural species—as animals can be given proper (species) names, groups of people can be differentiated from one another by family or clan names.

Totemic systems are elaborate mechanisms for expressing this perception. "The differences between animals, which man can extract from nature and transfer to culture ... [abstractly as myths or more concretely as feathers, beaks, teeth] are adopted as emblems by groups of men in order to do away with their own resemblances."⁹ The two systems of human and natural classes are united by metaphoric connections; often, the human classes interact with one another in the same way their totemic emblems interact in nature. For instance, informal, so-called "joking" relationships among the Luapula in Africa cross clan lines according to "natural" rules: the Leopard and Goat clans because the leopards eat goats; the Mushroom and Anthill clans because mushrooms grow on anthills; the Mush and Goat clans because men like meat in their mush; the Iron clan jokes with all clans with animal names because animals are killed by metal spears and bullets; and the Rain clan is superior to all because without it leopards, goats, mushrooms—even mush and clay—would not exist. The concrete infrastructure of the group—just how the group is divided into families—generates a conceptual scheme—a system of named clans—that then takes part in ordering the group's social relations.

A part of this conceptual scheme is embodied in the society's marriage rules, which make sure that people marry the right people in order to cement social relationships. Levi-Strauss proposes that women are used as units of exchange between groups of men, most evidently in small-scale societies. In such groups food prohibitions follow family lines rather than being universally enforced. They are not independent cultural symbols on the order

of the family or clan; food taboos are produced by a totemic system to reinforce the marriage rules by stressing the "terms" of the system, the clan groups. Levi-Strauss says, "Both the exchange of women and the exchange of food are means of securing or of displaying the interlocking of social groups..."

Levi-Strauss postulates that food taboos occur more often in matrilineal societies, in which the relative power of obligations to a husband's and wife's respective kin groups can be ambiguous. The mother's kin group needs the reinforcement that totemic food taboos can give. A patrilineal system usually endows the father's kin group with a clearer dominant role and greater enforcement power.

So Levi-Strauss pulls sexism, or at least the sexual division of roles and rights, back to an origin in radical sociology—the original forming of human groups. Levi-Strauss, however, accepts as a given that men use women as exchange, and women do not have any control over men; that men's control of marriage exchange is universal; and that the underlying opposition of women and men is as fundamental, and ancient, as the discrimination of animal and human. He posits man as the consumer, woman as the consumed, and feels that a metaphorical transformation makes societies pattern food exchange after kinship—that is, female—exchange. (In this argument he takes note of the widespread connection between sex and eating.) His assumption puts the subordination of women prior to any of its expressions and asserts that the discriminating actions (food taboos, lack of property rights, etc.) are not implicated in *creating* the very idea they're said to be supporting (women's inferior status). Levi-Strauss does not explain women's peculiar human status as a commodity. One could agree that by enmeshing people in a web of marriage obligations social groups gain cohesion, but one would not point thereby to the reasons women are exchanged and not men.

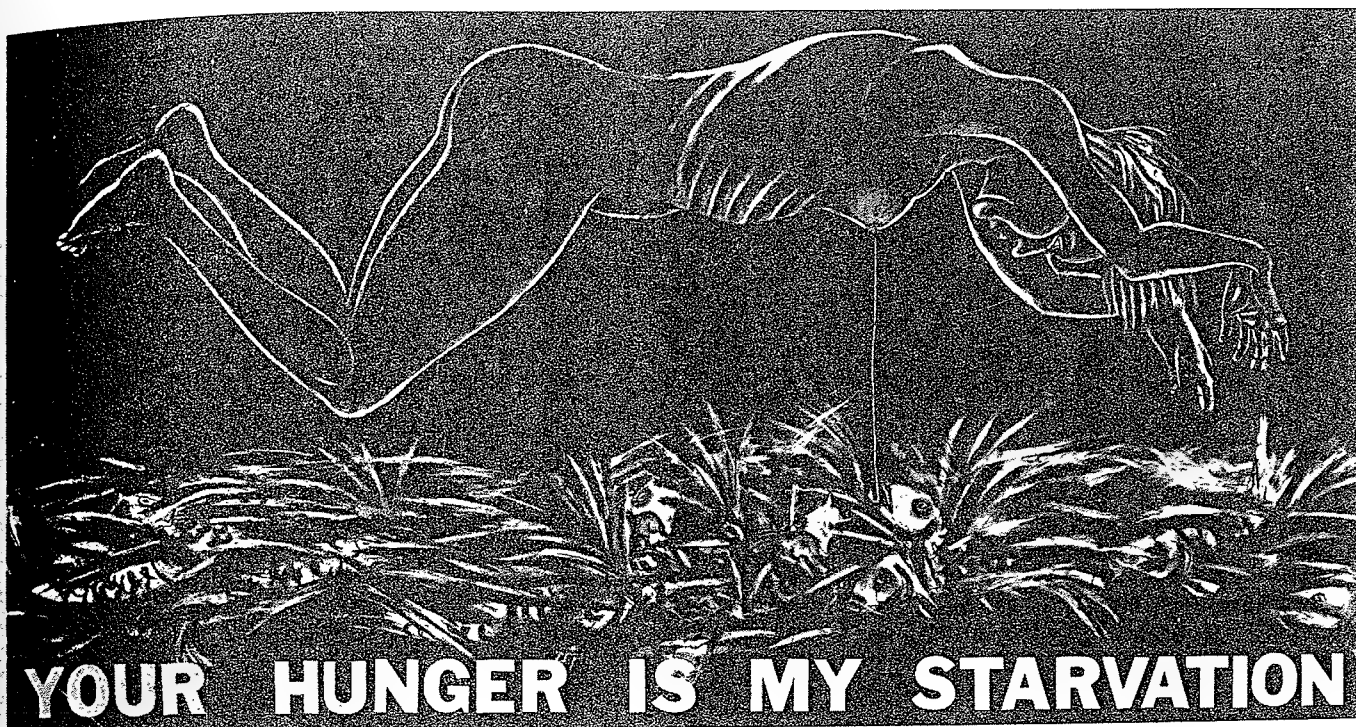
Mary Douglas, of a looser sociological school, agrees that social practices are figurative projections of social structure, but does not necessarily agree with Levi-Strauss on their origins in innate thinking patterns. She feels that "natural symbols" represent social discriminations, standing for kin groups, women, men, clans, classes, professions, and the like. Everything in a particular human universe has a place, and things out of place are dangerous. The human body is the intrinsic symbolic field; pollution and taboos are expressed in terms of food, menstrual fluid, semen, and other materials of life, because the life and form of a social group is so like the life and form of an individual. An association initially metaphoric turns into something real—a marriage rule, a ritual, a house plan, a classification of what is edible and what is not.

In one of her many books, Douglas makes these interesting observations:

... I suggest that food is not likely to be polluting at all unless the external boundaries of the social system are under pressure. ... The analysis of ritual symbolism cannot begin until we recognize ritual as an attempt to create and maintain a particular culture, a particular set of assumptions by which experience is controlled. ...

A double moral standard is often applied to sexual offenses. In a patrilineal system of descent wives are the door of entry to the group. ... Through the adultery of a wife impure blood is introduced to the lineage. So the symbolism of the imperfect vessel weighs more heavily on the women than on the men. ...

When male dominance is accepted as a central principle of social organization and applied without inhibition and with full rights of physical coercion, beliefs in sex pollution are not



Nancy Halvorsen, untitled drawing, 1986.

Nancy Halvorsen is a visual artist living in California.

likely to be highly developed. On the other hand, when the principle of male dominance is applied to the ordering of social life but is contradicted by other principles such as that of female independence, ... then sex pollution is likely to flourish.¹⁰

Douglas interprets food prohibitions in light of her formulation of pollution: a symbolic something in the symbolically wrong position—matter out of place (in a women's mouth), women out of place. If Durkheim and others have put forward social interpretations of what we know, Douglas works from a social interpretation of what we perceive.

Other structuralists stress woman's ambiguous position between nature and culture; like nature, she is fertile in and of herself, but she is also the socializer of children and, as such, a cultural agent. She works many of the transformations of nature into culture—cooking, pottery, gardening—all the time holding the seething pot of procreation and sexual freedom within herself, which must be controlled by marriage rules and allied practices like food taboos. As the mediators between nature and culture, women are subject to more stringent rules than men, who control but do not sustain culture.

Certain psychoanalysts, among them Jacques Lacan, bring the identification of women and nature down to a deep psychic level and make language—the symbolic process—the socializing agent. Men are identified with the social law and its expression in language. Lacan can then give society its due as the inventor of cultural content because he doesn't tie specific content to particular psychic events; the symbolic is an open, creative process. (Lacan, however, still believes in the primacy of the child's struggle with "the Oedipus," by which he means the "phallus," identified by the child with the father, not the biological phallus. This Oedipus is represented in the symbolic process, the surrendering to language and the proper name—thus, Lacan puts the father on the side of culture and the mother on the side of nature, in a psychoanalytic variation of

the nature vs. culture paradigm of the anthropologists.)

I have been attracted by many of these sociological ideas because they say things are not so simple as they appear. But in researching this article I read this statement by Marvin Harris about how to change food preferences: "If foodways are largely emanations of ignorant, religious, or symbolic thoughts, then it is what people think that needs to be changed. If, on the other hand, what seem like harmful religious or symbolic thoughts are actually themselves embodied in or constrained by practical circumstances surrounding the production and allocation of food resources, then it is these practical circumstances that need to be changed."¹¹ To a materialist, these ideas are heady. For, although I can understand how ideas can get trapped in physical bodies, I can see even better how necessity can be rationalized and how social class can determine ideology, here the ideology of food.

Harris ascribes food taboos to women's lessened economic contribution during pregnancy and says that the third-world family has few choices in how it can distribute food to its members. If the woman eats more, as she must during pregnancy, who will eat less? Harris' analysis puts economic reality at the heart of food folkways. But, doing so, Harris flirts with dangers also present in the theory of folkways as commonsense science. First, his materialist analysis reflects a society's economic realities without being able to predict other things about the society. Then, it suggests people are passive in the face of economic hardship: "If I can't work when I'm pregnant and there's not enough to go around, I won't eat as much," rather than, "We have to find a way to get more food so I can eat now when I really need to." Harris evaluates culture in terms of costs and benefits without analyzing the class relations that create the poverty forcing hard choices on people.

Harris' analysis has another weakness; his explanation of why women in particular are the focus of food prohibitions—within poor societies where all are hungry—is based on flawed perceptions of women's contributions to family income. We

know that food taboos often carry over from pregnancy to lactation. Although some women may be less productive when pregnant, they certainly aren't handicapped in the amount of work they can do by nursing. In fact, women in many areas of the world spend large parts of their life pregnant or nursing—from 50%–80% of their time during their fertile decades¹²—and still manage to raise a large percentage of the world's food.

More interesting socio-economic analyses are those that address who controls production, labor, and surpluses. To some eyes, food prohibitions, although not actors in the economic arena per se, are mediating symbols of economic control and contradictions. These mediating symbols help people grasp how unlike or contradictory things are like or compatible.

Bridget O'Laughlin investigated why the Mbum women of Tchad don't eat chicken or goat meat. She constructed her analysis this way: 1) chickens and goats are not kept for meat, but for sacrifices; 2) men control not only the rituals of sacrifice, but the chickens, goats, land, surplus kin group labor (patrilineal kin groups), and agricultural surplus, leaving women with little power—although their productive contribution is approximately equal to the men's; 3) men also control the production of offspring through control of marriage and bridewealth; and, so, 4) women are symbolically aligned with the domestic animals (chicken and goats), the sacrifice of which, like women's childbearing, increases the group's wealth and well-being. Like doesn't eat like. (A much abbreviated precis.) Women's penalties for transgressing the food prohibitions are sterility and painful childbirth. The Mbum know that men can be sterile as well but don't blame male sterility on a comparable lapse in conduct. Women, a form of wealth, are thought more prone to go astray and more vul-

nerable because so valuable. Ms. O'Laughlin writes, "The marriage rule metaphorically stated as a food prohibition does not describe a pattern of exchange of women but instead defines the underlying subordination of women inherent in systems where women become relations between groups of men."¹³

Arguments allied to O'Laughlin's have been made based on meat's being a unit of extradomestic exchange; meat, thus, is unlike what comes from a woman's garden, which is consumed by the family itself. The outside exchange is made from a surplus controlled by men, owners of domesticated animals and hunters of game. They use such exchanges to cement relationships with other men and to promote marriages. This theory has the merit of predicting both the currency of most food taboos—animal food—and who must obey them. Alice Schlegel, who has written of the division of labor as a source of sexual stratification, expands on this: "Social power, as expressed in relations of dominance and submission, is not a relation of person to goods but rather a relation of person to person, for which goods may provide the material basis."¹⁴

All explanations must grapple with other questions, such as: "how are food taboos enforced" and "by whose authority are they enforced." The severity of the punishments levied against violators points to just how vital the underlying reality

being protected by the eating rules is in a society's eyes.

The problem of who authorizes these practices and their enforcement has a historical dimension, since cultures are not static. Many small-scale cultures have been profoundly affected by colonialism and the on-going economic and cultural hegemony of former colonizers. It could be that food taboos against women are relatively recent practices, not remnants of the past; taboos may reflect women's loss of social power brought about by imported patriarchal attitudes.

The division of effort between male hunters and women farmers may once have been an adaptive strategy of basically egalitarian societies (even if sexually stratified). Today, as environments are attacked and game populations decline, the men's contributions to subsistence have become less crucial. This process coincides with women's loss of land rights to patriarchal ownership systems and with breaks in the web of kinship obligations, which once gave women sources of support. Kinship systems are being eroded by the pressures of modernization and by male migration to urban areas.

The question of whose authority institutes food taboos eventually leads us back—as have most of the theories examined here—to the profound problem of why sexual stratification and sexual inequality are so widespread. Although I have too

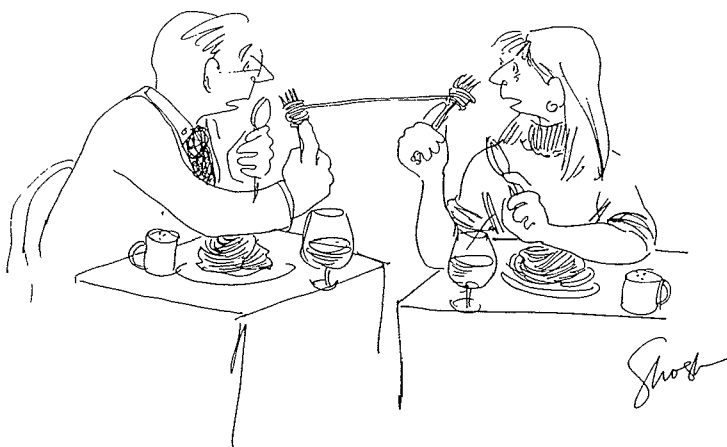
little space to explore theories of sexual inequality, I do want to raise the important question, "Is sexism real—a distinct kind of unjust discrimination—or an artifact of other social forces, such as the class struggle endemic in third-world societies (or between the regions)?" I think this question can be related to my questions on food prohibitions if we refer to it the nutritional deficits of women, which are aggravated by food taboos, pollution fears, sex-biased discrim-

inations, religious status, and other bars to women's fair share of calories. In interviews with health workers in Africa, India, North Africa, and elsewhere, it's evident that food taboos are not something from the primitive past but still operate in women's everyday lives.¹⁵

When one injustice, women's peculiar nutritional status, is embedded in another injustice, widespread hunger and unequal access to what food there is, should that change our reaction to the discriminatory injustice to women? As feminists, how do we sort out causes and allies? How do we feel if the arguments for women's liberation are in terms of economic development and "augmenting the labor force for social transformation" (i.e., women's duty to have children) rather than, or at the neglect of, our Western definitions of justice?

Some women work on the premise that economic restructuring by itself will erase sexual inequalities—among which are discriminatory access to food and the tools, education, and credit to produce it. Others insist on mounting a parallel attack on sexism as an independent ideology. We all might agree on a strategy if we could agree on the source of women's un-

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equal status (and could define inequality more precisely). But do we need a sure answer to act?

We do need to focus our efforts at the grassroots level, because we don't want to duplicate the class divisions in American feminist experience. If we undertake to unite a universalist struggle for economic justice and a feminist struggle for liberation from the effects of sexism, how can we translate the fight against sexism into actions that also work for universal benefits? One route is to focus on women as growers, processors, marketers, and preparers of food and on women's nutritional handicaps. Remember, in this last regard, how food prohibitions cluster around pregnancy. Continual pregnancies are a prime source of women's health problems where food is poor and healthcare worse. In poor country after country, health workers report very high rates of anemia, 80% and over, in childbearing women. With blood on our fingers every month, we know that some sex differences can never be "fixed." When we reckon that every pregnancy means a woman needs 80,000 added kilocalories and every six months of lactation, 135,000,¹⁶ we see that one sex pays a heavier price for continuing society than the other—and must be paid justice in kind.

We should also recognize all that women's segregation as chief cooks means in places where preparing food takes a lot of energy—where harvesting and grinding grain are done by hand with inefficient technologies, where water must be brought to the kitchen every day, where fuel must be gathered for every meal, and where gardens are cultivated with hoes and digging sticks, not tractors. Making processing and cooking chores easier for women raises everyone's nutritional status—as long as we look critically at the assumption that woman as cook represents some "natural" division of labor in a sex-complementary society.

In general, American feminists don't understand how separate can be equal. To most of us, a discriminatory practice like a food prohibition aimed only at women just has to imply a sexist ideology. We've cast our understanding of sexual inequality in psychological terms more than economic ones. Our industrial, patriarchal, and fragmented society has little history of the independence women may gain in traditional obligatory societies, where rights and duties are seen as complementary and flow from group relationships rather than individual status. We would judge the Mbum woman's place as unequal given her lack of control over surplus wealth. But perhaps her position today is the result of a deterioration under colonial forces, and her power could be recaptured in a transformed society. But maybe not. Her sex's disadvantages could be formed of ancient material and reflect the reality of sexism. Then only an attack on the interpenetration of economic, social, and symbolic factors that make sexism a societal theme can put chicken on her plate.

¹ Day by day field reports in Mountford, Charles Percy, *Anthropology and Nutrition*, Vol. 2, [1960].

² Examples have been documented throughout Africa (especially prohibitions on eggs, chicken, and goats), Oceania (fruit and pork), India, Southeast Asia, North Africa, and in most small-scale cultures. See Simoons and Harris below in particular.

³ Humphrey, Caroline, "Women, Taboo, and the Suppression of Attention," in Shirley Ardener, et. al., *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society*, 1978.

⁴ Certain terms are used in this article that refer to relatedness and inheritance in small-scale societies. "Exogamous" means that people must marry out of their birth clan/totem groups, thus bringing two clans into easy or uneasy relationship ("endogamous" is the opposite term, true of caste and feudal societies); "matrilineal" and "patrilin-



ear" are opposed terms denoting through which side of a family rights, duties, and property are passed to younger generations (matrilineal systems are often controlled by women's brothers, not by the women themselves); "matrilocal" and "patrilocal" refer to where newly married couples live (the "mother" and "father" representing larger groups of kin, in most cases).

⁵ Reported in Yudkin, John, *Changing Food Habits*, 1964.

⁶ This is one of the chicken-or-egg questions—whether our psychic nature dictates the form our social life takes, or the social structure we live in forms our psychological nature. I'm sidestepping that issue because I think neither dimension necessarily subordinates the other. Material (below) on the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan from Lemaire, Anike, *Lacan*, 1983.

⁷ Simoons, Frederick J. *Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances in the Old World*, 1961.

⁸ Structural linguistic theory says that the content of the word—the object it represents—does not determine the syntactical relations in an utterance; one term can be substituted for another as long as the grammatical relationships are not violated (subject nouns cannot be substituted for verbs, in simplistic terms). Noah Chomsky goes further and theorizes that grammar is an innate characteristic of humans; only a proto- or "generative" grammar embedded in the brain can explain how children acquire language so rapidly. Levi-Strauss similarly theorizes that certain logical patterns are innate, e.g., thinking in terms of opposites.

⁹ Levi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*, 1966 (in English). All following quotes by Levi-Strauss are from this same source.

¹⁰ Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 1966. See also Mary Douglas (ed.), *Natural Symbols*, 1973, for detailed analyses of how social structure is reflected in the actual details of life; in particular, see P. Bourdieu, "The Berber House" in that source.

¹¹ Harris, Marvin. *Good to Eat*, 1985.

¹² Harrington, Judith. "Nutritional Stress and Economic Responsibility: A Study of Nigerian Women," in Mayra Buvinic, ed., *Woman and Poverty in the Third World*, 1983.

¹³ O'Laughlin, Bridget. "Mediation of Contradiction: Why Mbum Women Do Not Eat Chicken," in Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture, and Society*, 1974.

¹⁴ Schlegel, Alice. Title essay in *Sexual Stratification: A Cross-cultural View*, 1977.

¹⁵ Statistics taken from Huston, Perdita, *Third World Women Speak Out: Interviews in Six Countries on Change, Development, and Basic Needs*, 1979.

¹⁶ Harrington, op. cit.

Kathie Brown is an artist, typographer, and secular humanist living in NYC. She takes book learning and street life seriously.



The *Comedores Populares*—popular restaurants or common dining rooms—have been created by women in Peru in response to their economic crisis. In these, families from the slums surrounding Lima eat together. The women buy the food in bulk at cheaper prices and take turns preparing it, thus freeing them from this daily task. While working together, the women discuss community solutions to various problems from water sanitation to wife battery. This process has broken down their isolation, helped them to see the power of women coming together, and created more possibilities for becoming politically active.



PHOTOS BY CHARLOTTE BUNCH & ROXANNE CARILLO



Indigenous movements are developing that address the specific regional concerns of women's lives and that expand the definition of what feminism means and can do in the future.

from Bringing the Global Home: Feminism in the '80s—Book III by Charlotte Bunch

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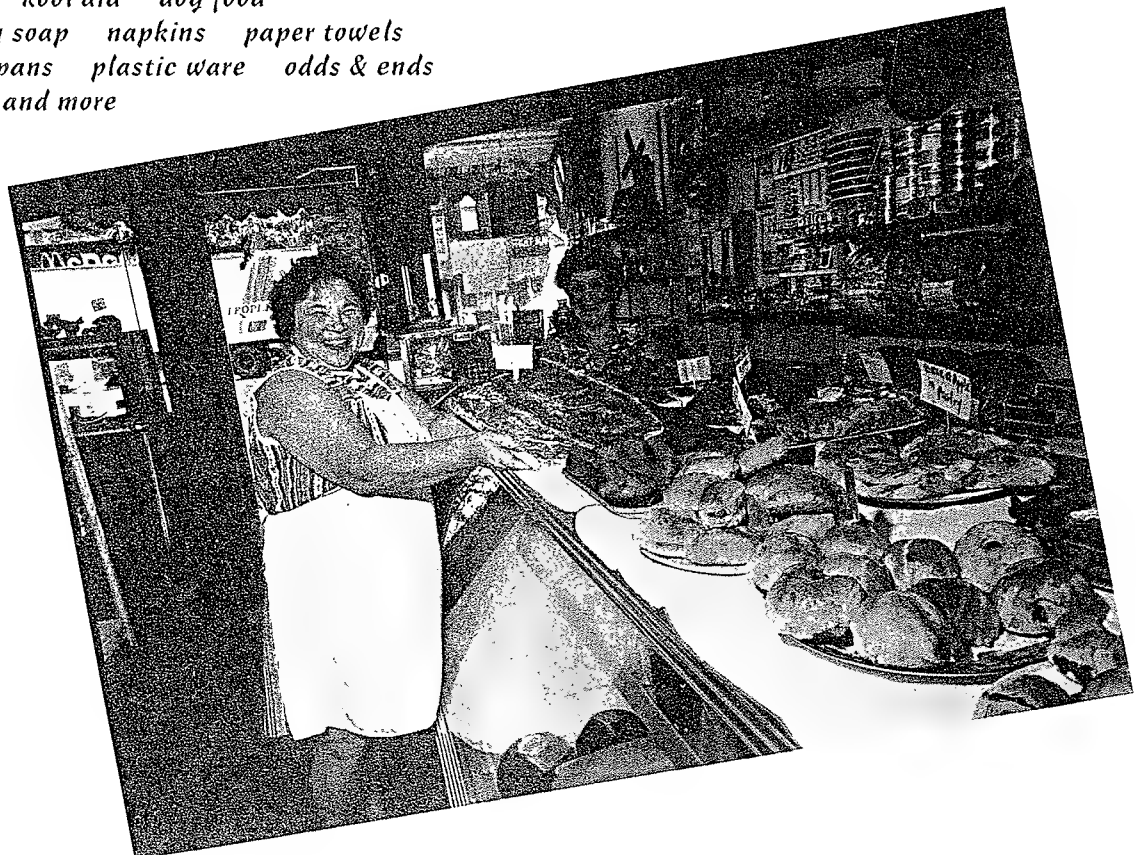
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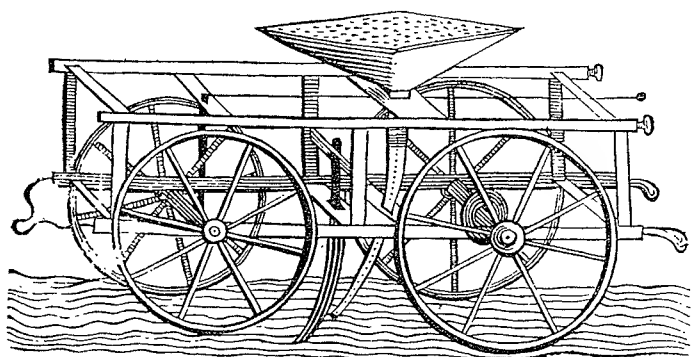
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gifts and more

a found poem

*Mary Moran is a writer
 and artist living
 in Madison, WI.*

Nina Kuo





The FARM

Elizabeth
Kulas

I grew up in New England near my grandparent's farm, on a mountain, overlooking a small town. I am the eldest of eight children.

I remember standing next to Babci ("Grandmother" in Polish) as she cut a chicken's neck before supper. We were talking about life—Why did John, the second of her twelve children, die? Why did she come from Poland? Why did she marry Dżadzi? Was she in love with him when they married?—as the fresh blood flowed down her dress and onto the large stone steps that led into her home.

In the kitchen she plucked the chicken and singed the remaining hairs with a lighted newspaper, above the old wood stove. I was fascinated by this stove, and yet proud—no minuscule temperature controls there, and such a large surface, why she could put a hundred pots on it!

Babci showed me how to cut apples, slicing the skins very thin for pies. We sang Polish songs while preparing the pastry dough on the large kitchen table. Dżadzi would walk in smelling from the barn, and we would make fun of that as he rested a bit before supper in his favorite chair by the stove. I churned butter. I made butter. Up and down, up and down. I licked it, tasting the freshness as the cream clung to the churning stick and overflowed. Butter, which I pressed lovingly into a dish, butter which Dżadzi would eat for supper. I knew my children would not make butter. Somehow that frightened me.

In the fall, I collected apples with my sisters, Barbara and Kathy, in the orchard next to the barns. In the winter, we picked over them in the dark, stone cellar where they were stored. We would remove the ones that had started to rot so that the good ones wouldn't be ruined. In the summer, we fought off huge black and yellow spiders to gather the raspberries Mom would make into pies and then jam for winter.

Some mornings we'd go out with Babci into the deep woods

in back of the house to pick mushrooms for supper, or we'd work in the garden. In the afternoons we'd play in the frog pond. About four, we'd go out into the pasture, always barefoot, to chase the cows on their well-worn paths. It was milking time.

I remember joking one day with my sisters, influenced by the kids in town, that Babci's and Dżadzi's reality was like a slice out of another century. "You can walk around a bend in the road and not know if you're in Poland or America! So why didn't they just stay there?" I said angrily. "Their farm exists in a world that doesn't even touch them. They live like peasants have for centuries. Why?"

Yet at the time, at the very same time, I realized I was witnessing a reality I would never see again. And that made me very sad. I saw two people living and working together on their own land, totally self-sufficient. How much longer will that continue, I asked myself.

After that realization I could no longer visit the farm without feeling an extraordinary sense of loss. I knew that what I was experiencing was on borrowed time.

I'd be reminded of that at odd moments, like the day when I was ten and I stumbled over a cow's head in the grass at the entrance to one of the pastures, just thrown aside after a slaughter. Ah, I'd seen this before, but it didn't cut through my astonishment. It was like being shot into another reality or a page from a history book—there I was, my bare feet planted in another time. As I looked at the bones in the soft grass I knew that I was witnessing the death of a culture, and that I would be forced to step from one into another.

As I walked alone that quiet, summer afternoon on the



grass that grew between the tire tracks on the dirt road leading home, the questions raged back and forth in my head —You mean we won't have pears in our backyards? We won't grow our own food? No. We'll be working in offices or factories, shuffling paper or tending machines.

I was ten and I was depressed. My world had changed that day. I had faced my two lives and, for the first time in my existence, what was before me had become crystal clear. When I got home, I told no one.

Toward the end of that summer, on one late afternoon in Babci's raspberry patch, I realized that I wouldn't churn butter; instead, I would become an artist in this twentieth century —the time in which I lived. I would have to choose between my budding creativity and a way of life I loved. No, I wouldn't wait for weeks, excitedly, for the cherries to ripen so I could taste my first pie. I wouldn't bring the hay in. I wouldn't drop my baby, as Babci did, and go out into the fields that same afternoon. I remembered my uncles when they told me these stories. "What a woman!" they would say of her. She wouldn't have given it a second thought. There was nothing in her mind, in the realm of her experience, that would ever have given her the thought that you don't put your dress back on and go out to work the earth after giving birth.

Sometimes I would think of that as I looked at her, as I followed her around the farm. I would never share with her what I knew. I loved her too much to tell her how much the world was changing.

I saw it happen. TECHNOLOGY. AGRIBIZ. When I was in sixth grade, I asked Mom why our neighbor, Fred, wasn't planting the field next to our house anymore. It didn't make sense. I made my statement: "There are no farmers that don't use their land. What's going on?"

She looked up for a moment as she swept and replied, "Times are tough. The government is paying him to keep his land fallow."

"Why?"

She responded as if it were somehow evident that the exchange of money was enough. "To help him."

She continued sweeping, so I didn't press. Instead, I went off to school. Every day, as I walked down the road to meet the school bus, I passed that field. Every day I looked at it and



wondered how you could help a small farmer by paying him to keep his land fallow. I couldn't get it out of my head as I passed Fred's field, and then there were others.

The answer wouldn't come to me until many years later, after I'd stopped reading the books I was given in school and went into the library myself to seek out my own answers. AGRIBIZ. I learned that while, on the one hand, small farmers were being paid to keep their land fallow, on the other, huge corporations were being subsidized by our government with our tax dollars. The result was that the land they paid small farmers to keep fallow was lowering production on one end, while the subsidies were raising it on the other. All the while, prices were rising.

As I pored over the books, I wondered, almost out loud, Who are the ones benefiting from that? Monopolies, as intended, grew, and soon small farmers could not compete.

During my teenage years, farms all over New England were shutting down as they are now out West. Sons went into factories. Everywhere you went you'd hear people say, "You can't work 'em. You can't survive."

You couldn't survive as Babci and Dzadzi had. Each day their own, but not. But yes! Babci could decide when to pick the eggs, and the eggs were hers. If she needed a particular herb, well, chamomile grew out in the chicken yard and in front of the house. And wild thyme, well, that grew in a number of pastures in abundance. And then there was the garden. The brown dirt on her hands gave her life.

I can remember running the dark, rich earth through my fingers again and again, and over my hands till it came up my arms. I knew what it was. It gave me life. I, too, understood my part in it, a part I had learned well and of which I was proud. The fact that we could grow food gave us power in relation to our lives—the ability to survive. To kids in town, dirt on you was "dirty," but to me it was brown gold. It was that from which I took life.

I visited my grandparents' farm this summer. It's empty. They're dead. The house, once a weathered, turn-of-the-century farmhouse, is now a gallant, spanking white. The old glass in the windows is gone, replaced by storm windows and bars. I'd

been inside before for a "tour of the restoration," a la *Good Housekeeping*. The fireplaces have been boarded over, the old wood painted various pastels. Where there were once wood stoves, there is now a central heating system. My grandparents' bedroom, once a wonderfully mysterious and precious place for my sisters and me, is now a fake, wood-panelled hunting den—"Early American Dream."

As I stared at the house from the road, I imagined it for a few moments as it used to be. The cool, clear, crisp day became suddenly sunny and warm. I remembered myself ambling up the hill to the front steps. I used to smile as I passed the lilac tree and the cheese hanging in the sun to dry. That joy was in my stride as I retraced the steps I'd so often taken.

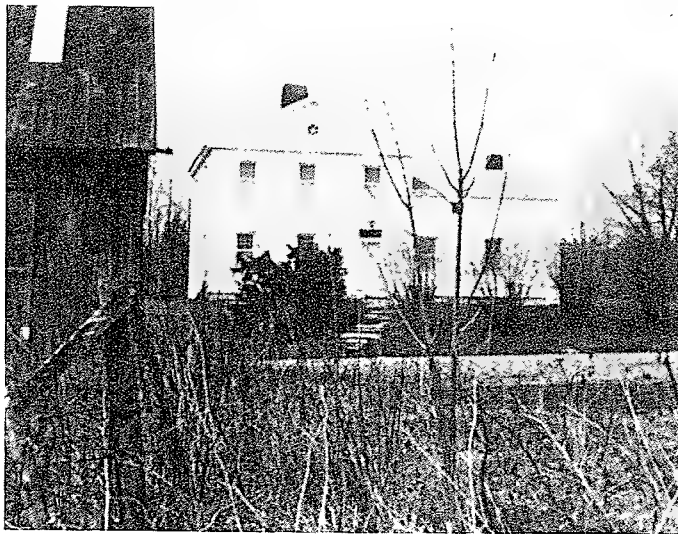
Sometimes I'd detour to the left, before greeting Babci and Dzadzi, to see the flower garden that grew to the side of the house. As I turned the corner, I could see that it was no longer there, nor was the cherry tree that had given us so much pleasure, nor the pear trees.

I walked to the back of the house, near the pantry, the pantry that once housed a million smells and boxes with lids. My sisters and I snuck in there every time Babci was out of the house, only to rush out if we heard her coming. The pantry is now a "breezeway." As I walked over the new flagstone patio outside the breezeway, I noticed a farm implement my grandfather used to use. It was placed on the corner as if to demarcate something. It was rusty now, "rustic"—a tasteful decoration. I tried figuring out what he had used it for. In plowing, perhaps. I touched it. I wanted to touch him again. As I saw it lying there on the patio they never used, I wondered what meaning it could have to them. It was my grandfather's. It was alive once. It had worked with the energy brought forth by my grandfather's hands. As I touched it, I tried to touch him. The iron was cold.

I sat near—I couldn't bring myself to sit next to—another "rustic farm machine" that used to be pulled by Dzadzi's horses. It was used to rake the fields after the hay had been cut, bound, and carted off to the barns. It picked up hay that had been left in the process. Nothing was ever wasted. It was one of the most beautiful of the earlier pieces of machinery. When tractors and trucks took the place of the horses, it was parked in back of one of the barns, where it stood for years. Today it is a lawn ornament, tastefully placed upon a cement base. It is on display now, a piece of art. Perfect, I thought, in case a *Better Homes and Gardens* photographer happens by, taking "Rustic New England Scenes."

As I stood up, I noticed that all of Babci's perennials and fruit trees were dead. They even cut the lilacs. How could they have cut the lilacs? Who cuts lilacs down? All the apple trees were gone, too. Why would you kill an orchard? There wasn't even one raspberry bush hidden in the fenceline that had escaped the carnage. Even the incline on which the berries had grown was gone. Everything had been "graded." It was "lawn" now.

I wondered, Where was the character of the earth's placement? And the willows? Where were they? And what hap-



pened to the swamp?

I sat for a moment and witnessed. It was like I had died—a piece of me. I didn't know what to think. I had known it would die. I couldn't cry. I was numb. I'd known with pain for too many years what I was finally to meet here. I was defeated, wasn't I? I had allowed myself to come back to touch these tender memories.

There was nothing I could do as I sat where the chicken yard had been, remembering the foot-thick oak beams I swung from in the barn, the barn I had promised to let live forever. A part of me tried to

recover myself. I remembered when my sister and I were jumping from the loft into the hay and the yellow jacket stung Kathy while she was in mid-air. I remembered that bizarre plum tree with those extraordinary yellow-green plums that we sat and ate for hours one day. I remembered the bunnies. Babci would pull back the hay and there they'd be—freshly born bunnies I'd tenderly soothe with my human hands.

But then I remembered the bitterness when I was little and how I repeated over and over again: "I will not be bitter. I will not grow old and bitter." I was so freshly alive then I couldn't even imagine what bitterness was. But I saw it happen all around me.



That day on my grandparents' farm, I sat but I couldn't get up. "I can't go home now. Not like this," I said aloud. I didn't know what to do next. So I sat, moving the dirt around the small plants before me with a piece of wood I held in my hand. There's nothing I can do, I thought. I am the little girl watching the big girl experience what she could not keep herself from. I am the adult, facing the child that I was—the adult who was not able to prevent what the child had known. I was unable to give myself what I had wanted—to save my culture from its death. I was still numb. There is nothing I can do at this moment, I thought, as there was nothing I could do as a little girl who knew that some day she would be sitting here, a witness. A silent witness.

Then I remembered that I was an artist. My art had always saved me in moments of despair. Yet I didn't trust it. It hurt too much this time to believe it could pull me up and out of this. I stood up as if to gain strength. I'll make a film, I thought. In my mind's eye I could see my camera following my father around, tending his trees, working his land. Can I get my father, who is just beginning to understand...will these silent, gentle, working people talk for me?

But I knew he couldn't talk for a camera. It is I who will have to speak for them, I realized.

Ah, I can go home now. I picked up my camera and walked toward the road. As I walked past the house, I thought of the present owner. She is benevolent. She attends bake sales to raise money for the church and she participates in town functions. But she will never not be different or a little apart. And

she holds herself so.

I didn't hate her. I hated what had happened. It is systemic, common practice in a capitalist marketplace the survival of the monied. I thought of how what happened to Babci's and Džadzi's farm happened to many small farms. New England is full of small farms that are now the summer homes of the urban rich. The real tools—the implements of people's lives—are now quaint, rustic decorations—artifacts.

As I walked to the frog pond I readied my camera for the first time. I was not afraid to be on her land—we are allowed to walk the land that we once knew as our own. I pointed my camera toward the woods, those deep woods where, every summer, I still go to pick the blackberries that grow there. I take my youngest brother, Kris, with me and show him where the largest and most succulent can be found hiding in the shade beneath the largest trees. We pick until we're exhausted. We often walk the hills and valleys the owner has not seen. We find the few rare blackcaps, which taste different from blackberries, and the green, translucent berry of the gooseberry bush. Sometimes we search for the patch with the largest wild strawberries that we discovered the first time we went into the woods together, when Kris was only two. Then, I'd walk with him and tell him how many cows Džadzi used to have and how he farmed. I wanted him to know what I could not put from my mind.

As I walked back to the road, my feet got wet in the surrounding swamp. The pond had become a swamp because there was no one to drain it and dig out the rich silt, as they had when the farm was a farm. Then the pond provided tons of ice which was used to cool the milk in the summer.

I noticed that my feet were covered with mud. But I didn't care. I felt good.

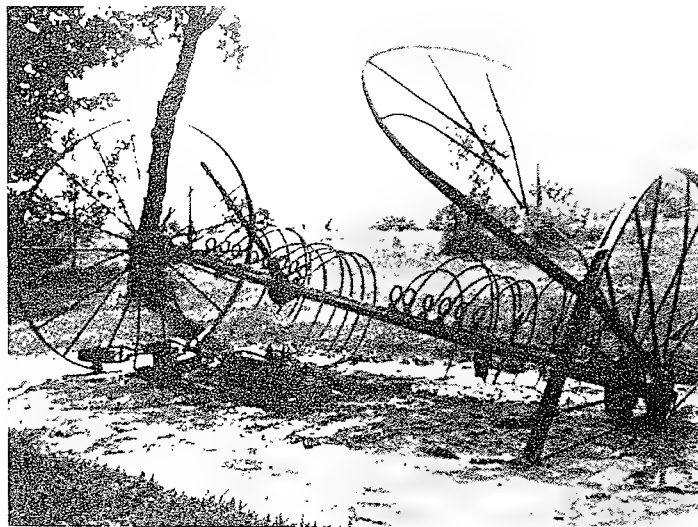
Next to the fence were a few dried-up burdock bushes. We used to run into them now and then. Once we got burdocks in our clothes, they were hard to get out, and forget it if we got them in our hair! But the nice thing about them is that we could make rugs, pocketbooks, baskets, and all kinds of things—they stuck together so well.

It hurt to see Džadzi's hay-baler out there rusting in the field. I remembered the sound it made when it was new and out in one of Džadzi's huge fields, everyone working alongside it. The men wore no shirts and beads of sweat glistened all over their broad, muscular backs. God, they were beautiful. The wind would blow the chaff up on us where it would stick to our sweat, itching us to death as we'd heave fifty-pound bales of newly mown, sweet-smelling hay onto the flatbed trucks. I loved it.

Then I'd get home and hear Mom say to Dad, "You got those girls out there hayin' again? I thought I told you..."

And I'd hear Dad, a little gingerly, yet proud, yell back: "Yup! Can't stop 'em!"

Mom would go about muttering how we were "girls" and were going to have babies some day and this could very well hurt our private parts—lifting and heaving these bales. We'd smile and keep out of sight. We were ten, eleven and twelve



—we could do anything.

I started to walk again, past the maples my father had planted when he was a boy. How straight and tall they stood. And full.

I'll give these pictures to Dad, I thought. Dad, who shares these memories with me, secretly, who harbored them for years without saying anything.

When I was almost home, I decided to stroll down to Fred's farm. Fred was one of the last people in the area trying to farm. No one was about so I walked to the back of the barn. I'd known Fred all my life but I felt funny walk-

ing on his land with no one about. God, I thought, I'm still so fresh from the city. When you visit people you have to find them first, so it's just natural to walk to the barn or up behind them while they're working. I would have to get used to that again.

At the back of the barn I found a corral with a herd of thirty young heifers, and Fred's two young children running among them. "Don't scare me to death!" I screamed.

"It's okay," Fred's daughter said. "We do this all the time."

I'd forgotten what it was like to run among them. Fred's children showed me their favorite cows and told me their names. We talked to the cows and petted them. I could see the cows responding and I flushed with a respect I'd known long ago.



When I arrived home, I ran into Dad in the driveway. I told him about the photographs. He immediately started talking about the trees he'd planted: "Did you see how big they've grown?"

With my face turned a little to hide the tears, I said, "Yes, Dad. I touched them today. They've grown into beautiful trees."

"Ah, you walked up to the farm today." He smiled.

It was not supposed to be called "the farm" anymore. Mom told me that one day after it had been sold. It was to be called by the last name of the new owners. But I couldn't stop. And I knew it warmed Dad. So we spoke quietly, barely above a whisper. It would always be the farm for us.

When I got into the house, I plopped into a chair in the living room. I was looking forward to the light, cool evening one finds in the summer in the mountains.

I needed to rest and be alone, but my mother came into the room.

"There's something I know you'll want to know." She said it so quietly I became apprehensive. I could see the barren fields outside the window outline her body as she leaned toward me to speak. "Fred lost the farm."

"No." The same numb feeling I had felt that morning crept into me. "But," I began, "I was just down there. They were milking."

"The bank and the milk company pulled a fast one on him. The milk company withheld payment on this last shipment so the bank foreclosed."

"What do you mean? How could they do that?" I responded with anger, as if somehow my anger could change what I was being told. "Can't—"

"No," she said. "They were in it together. They set it up."

I looked at this strong, invincible woman—Mom. I wondered if I would ever be like her. Yet there she stood, helpless in the middle of her living room. She was looking to me for strength. But I was angry. "This was legal?" I asked.

"No."

"Then how could they..."

"They just did. There was nothing he could do. It's complicated. They've been trying to do it for years. It was just a matter of time," she said.

"But the cows..." I protested. I still did not want to believe her.

"Those are the last few of his cows. He was supposed to get rid of them last week. They gave him a week to get off the land."

I could see her sadness now. She hadn't moved as she



spoke. Mom always moved when she talked. This was serious. I realized we now shared the same love for the land I had known as a child.

"Who bought the land?" I asked, pacing in front of her.

"The government."

"What are they going to do with it?"

"It's going to become a federal preserve. Forever. No one can touch it."

"So," I said, finally, "it's just going to be there doing nothing. Here's a farmer who wants to farm. He gets thrown off his land. And the government buys it to just let it sit there and do nothing. Where's he going to go?"

"Nowhere. He won't leave. It was so sad," she said, looking at me intently. "I went down there the day they took the cows away. The Father came."

I smiled. I could just see this Roman Catholic priest standing in the middle of the road in his elegant, black tunic as they loaded most of Fred's cows onto trucks to be taken away.

"Everyone was crying," she continued. "There was nothing we could do."

"It's good you were there," I said, looking into her eyes. I felt her hurt.

"I wanted him to know I cared," she said.

"How can they take a man's life away from him like that? Is he okay?"

"People are worried. That's why Father came."



By staying, Fred is considered a bit of a fool by the townspeople, someone who will not accept reality. The townspeople don't see agribiz. It's not reported in the newspapers or, if it is, you have to read between the lines. They see things more simply—they see that a man has failed, rather than a system. This is how they see all the farmers who lose their farms, except for the ones who hung themselves in their barns.

It wasn't until the second day of my visit this summer that I saw my brother, Kris—Kris at sixteen. He came running into the house, threw off his Friendly Ice Cream Parlor uniform, and pulled on his jeans and boots. Once again, I saw the broad, tanned, muscular back that one gets from laboring in the country sun. I grabbed him and kissed him.

"Hi. What a chest! Where are you going in such a hurry?" I said.

"To help Fred hay."

"But Fred doesn't own his farm anymore. What's he doing haying?"

Kris looked at me with a smooth agitation, like it didn't matter what I thought, like he had heard this before and would kindly disregard it.

"He loves it. Look, if he calls, tell him I'm on my way." And he was out the door.

I thought about the conversation I'd had with Mom about Kris when he was fourteen. We had talked many times about my "littlest brother"—how he was doing in school, the problems he faced, and what course he would take with his life. We were concerned. What would he do? There are not many choices that are truly wonderful and exciting for rural youth in America. And that is what you want for someone you love—something wonderful.

Mom walked in as the door slammed behind Kris. She said, "You know, I was talking with him just the other day. He's decided what he wants to be."

"What? What?" I could hardly contain my excitement, remembering the many conversations we'd had with him. And now, finally, he had some idea.

She hesitated. I could see her eyes question how I would receive this.

"What is it Mom?"

"He wants to be..." she stopped. Then very quietly she said, "He wants to be... a farmer."

"A what?"

"A farmer."

I was beside myself, smiling and laughing. Where and how had this started? Had something been rekindled in those walks we shared when he a little boy? Or had it happened in a field somewhere, one bright, sunny afternoon as brown arm met summer sun and earth in an ageless ritual? Something had been reborn in this third generation, this generation born within the heart of technology. Ddadzi would have been proud of this child he had not seen.

Kris wants to be a farmer. ■

Elizabeth Kulas is a visual artist, writer, and political activist living in NYC. She has been active in alternative cultural collectives since 1975.

An Only Pleasure

by Michael Kendall

I remember my grandmother at 91 remarking that food had become her one remaining pleasure. And so it was food that I brought to her. Very special things, like steamed shrimp, boiled peanuts, whiting and flounder sandwiches, even lemon chicken (knowing all too well she preferred a deadlier, greasier Kentucky fried), or a yet more unfamiliar dill-marinated salmon.

Of these offerings some she would joyfully eat, thereby reveling in the now all-but-forgotten earthly pleasures she so desired. Others she staunchly blocked from her frame of reference by chewing them until she could clearly identify them for what they were and then spitting them back at me. This was, after all, the final review of her life. Hence, each bite, as it was allowed to become part of her corporeality, allowed her, a blind and otherwise immobilized, bedridden amputee, to make a final and lasting journey back through her world. At 93 she quite effectively and without ceremony reached her journey's end and chose to eat no more.

... the last offerings? Those pleasures were obviously to be our own. And so it was, as neighbors and friends prepared and brought to us her favorite foods: fried chicken, okra with hamhocks and mean, greasy collard greens; potato salad, sides of pork loin, an amazing array of "bigger and sweeter" lemon meringue pies, chiffon cakes, and long lean drinks of peach schnapps that were "ice cold and sugar sweet."

By consuming certain of these, I willingly took her into me; others, I, a vegetarian, effectively kept out by ultimately throwing them back up. It was through these rituals—a table of memory-laden foods—that I began to mourn. As I did, my mind was flooded with images of her. How she must have looked in 1902, working in a blazing hot cotton patch in South Carolina, where she, a water girl, earned five cents a day. I saw her yet again, as a teenage girl secretly learning to buck dance, cakewalk, and sing "sinful reels" from the circus performers and minstrels who traveled along the banks of Cat Fish Creek and P.E.

River; as Grandma teaching us that we must greet each new year right, with hamhocks and black-eye peas; as Grandma asking me to buy her a black lace dress (and myself giving it to her)—"the only one I've ever received that cost more than fifteen dollars." And finally, as Annie Louise Hall Boyd being proudly buried in that dress. In what way are these memories still you, since here in the morgue you are a sheeted, ashen and lifeless form? Is this still your face I touch as I cast the final death mask? Are these shoulders from which I wash the plaster of Paris residue the same upon which I used to rest my head? Is this still my heart, disguised as a winged song called "forever now," your beautiful eulogy? Grandma, if these memories are no longer any more valid than this body that lays here before me is now useful, then to what realm should I abandon the love I still feel?

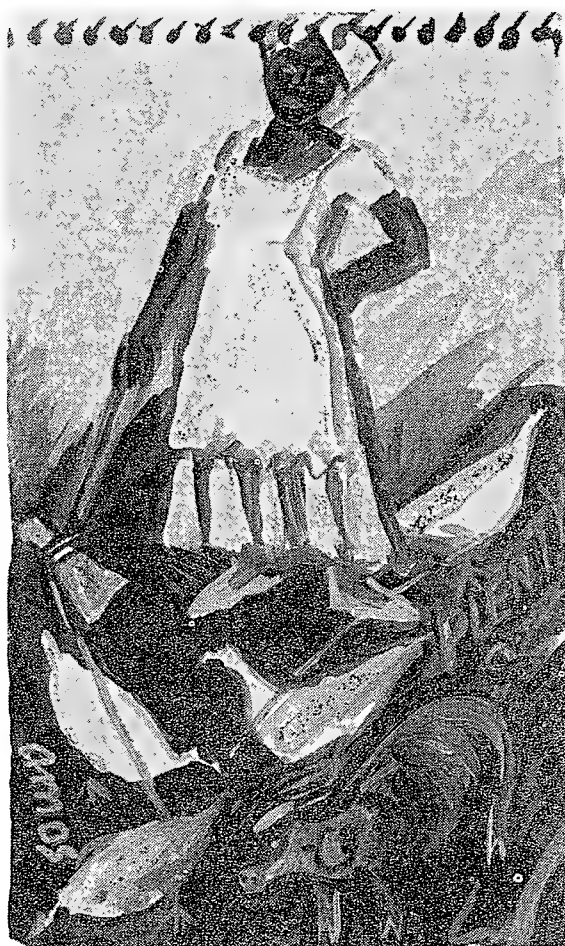
Our final meeting, the 25th of December: I, on my way to a family dinner,

held her hand as she lay in the hospital too comatose and too weak to respond in any other way than by, in turn, tightly squeezing my own hand. I wiped the thick white coating from her tongue, covered with a two-month-old residue from food she no longer ate. This was Christmas day. She had made her final and lasting peace. I ended by singing her a favorite reel:

"Good Lord when I got to heaven I heard the voice of a pork chop sing, come on to me and rest. Lie down, ye weary hoghead cheese, your head upon my breast. Talk about your string beans, your ham and eggs, your turkey that's roasted and dressed; but I think it was the voice of a pork chop which said, come on to me and rest." ♦

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Emma Amos, acrylic on paper, 1986

QUEEN KAAHUMANU

(Condensed from
Women Warriors, a young
adult book-in-progress)

It is the early 1800s. The sun shines with perfect warmth on a black-sand beach of Hawaii's Big Island. Suddenly, on the crest of the rough ocean waves appear several handsome, muscular women, their naked bodies glistening in the sun, their black hair streaming behind them. They surf atop their black-stained *wiliwili*-wood surfboards, bending and stretching like graceful dancers, even though they are very tall and weigh at least two hundred pounds each.

By their large size, these women are at once recognizable as *alii*, or chiefesses—members of Hawaii's aristocracy.* Related to each other by generations of intermarriage, the *alii* have always been very tall—the women close to six feet, the men often seven feet tall. They are an athletic and joyous people who love to swim, surf, fish, ride horses, and engage in romantic escapades. But most of all, the *alii* love to eat, for the largest person—the tallest and the widest—is considered the most beautiful, and the closest to the gods.

An especially large woman passes the others with her speed, a huge grin on her broad face. Weighing close to three hundred pounds, this grand figure is Kaahumanu, an *alii* of high rank, renowned as the greatest surfer of her day.

Kaahumanu (1772–1832) is also a Queen, married since the age of thirteen to the great King and unifier of the Hawaiian Islands, Kamehameha I (1758–1818). While Kaahumanu is but one of Kamehameha's twenty-one wives, she is known by all as his confidant, his trusted adviser, his favorite wife, his heart's passion. That this woman is willful and independent, that she runs her own life and much of the business of the kingdom, that she is sexually aggressive and delights in taking handsome young lovers, merely increases Kamehameha's desire for her.

When her beloved Kamehameha dies in Kailua in 1818, Kaahumanu, believing she can equal men in any of life's adventures, determines to keep the throne for herself. She will do so even though, by custom, it is Kamehameha's twenty-three year old son, Liholiho, who will be

crowned King Kamehameha II.

On the morning of the young man's coronation, Kaahumanu prepares. With the aid of attendants, she rolls herself into her traditional Hawaiian wrap-around skirt, or *p'au*, sewn of royal yellow satin. In this elegant *p'au*, the Queen now dons Kamehameha's *ahu-ula*, the red and yellow feathered warrior's cloak, which has always been worn only by male *alii*. Enveloped in this symbol of authority and grasping her late husband's heavy wooden spear, Kaahumanu glides regally to the beach-side coronation platform. She struts to the center of the stage, casts a knowing glance in Liholiho's direction, and, in a booming voice, proclaims to the stunned crowd that she is now *Kuhina Nui*, or Co-ruler of the Hawaiian Islands.

From her new position in this lush feudal kingdom, the Queen evaluates her situation and is not pleased. Although at this moment she is perhaps the strongest woman in the land, Kaahumanu still has not gained the equality with men that she seeks.

Nor is she happy about the position of Hawaiian women in general. While the grand chiefesses appear to be happy and powerful women—with high status in the class hierarchy, polygamous marriage rights, and possession of sacred power called *mana*—in fact, they suffer serious discrimination.

The major barrier for the Queen, for the chiefesses, and for women of the lower classes as well, is the *kapu* system—the ancient religious tabus that regulate almost every aspect of Hawaiian life, from canoeing to fishing, from dancing to eating. The aristocratic *alii* and the *kahunas*, or priests, who exercise dominant power on the islands, base their government on the strictures of this religion.

To Kaahumanu, the worst aspect of the *kapu* system is its underlying belief that women of all classes are inferior, less pleasing to the gods than men. While many activities are *kapu*, or forbidden, for men, many more are outlawed for women. Women are, for example, strictly bared from the *luakini heiaus*, the

temples where the major political and religious decisions are made—a *kapu* which inhibits Kaahumanu's power as *Kuhina Nui*.

But even more humiliating for women are the eating *kapus*. Women of all classes are forbidden to eat some of the most delicious foods: those plentiful yellow bananas, the sweet coconuts, pork, shark, sea turtle, whale, and the delicacy of baked dog. One bite of such foods, say the *kahunas*, will infuriate the gods, causing illness, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions. Moreover, say the priests, food for women and men must be cooked by men only, in separate ovens, and eaten at sex-segregated tables.

The penalty for breaking any *kapu* is severe. The priests cruelly enforce the laws, especially against lower-class women and men, capturing the law breakers, burning them, strangling them, plucking out their eyes.

In the days following the coronation coup, Kaahumanu takes her favorite surfboard far out into the ocean, to find inspiration for overthrowing the onerous food tabus. She knows it is not the gods she must fear, for surely they would have punished the people by now. For forty years, she has watched foreign women in Hawaii sit with men at the same dinner table and eat forbidden foods with no ill effects. She remembers the day long ago she secretly ate pork and even some shark without so much as a stomach ache.

Kaahumanu remembers a sea captain's news that the people of the nearby Society Islands recently overthrew their own *kapu* system. Yes, thinks Kaahumanu, it is not the gods, but the chiefs and priests who derive power from the *kapu* system, who must be dealt with.

Kaahumanu is a woman who loves food, loves her people, and loves political power. Determined to gain full eating rights for women, freedom for all who are oppressed by the *kapu* system, and full political power for herself, the Queen makes a decision at last, just as she catches a large wave. She will organize the women of Hawaii in a revolution against the food *kapus*.

*The term "chiefesses" is widely used in Hawaiian texts.

by Susan Ribner

Back on land, Kaahumanu rushes off to enlist the help of Liholiho's mother, Queen Keopuolani, a powerful high chiefess known for her great *mana*. Soon the two are busy recruiting both *alii* and common women for Kaahumanu's scheme.

Before long, word travels across the islands that some enormous women have begun gathering secretly to taste the outlawed delicacies. Meeting quietly in the dark of night on the beaches, or early in the morning in the mountains, the women clutch each other's hands and try small bites of banana and coconut, tiny mouthfuls of smokey pork. Volcanoes do not erupt, and the ocean is calm. No one feels sick. The courageous women have broken the *kapus*.

Everywhere throughout the Hawaiian Islands, women of all classes begin to eat forbidden foods in public, in front of men, laughing raucously. The militant "ai noa" or "free eating" movement is born.

The Queen has one last eating *kapu* to break. Liholiho must eat at the same table with the women. And he must do so publicly.

"No," says Liholiho, "Never!"

The two women cajole, threaten, eat several bananas in front of him, and finally persuade Liholiho that, faced with a united rebellion of half of Hawaii's population, he has no choice. During the first week of November, 1819, he will host an enormous royal feast where there will be "free eating."

On the third night of the new moon, the leading chiefs and chiefesses of the Big Island and their foreign friends arrive at the grand outdoor feast, and seat themselves at the two long, elaborately set tables, one for women and one for men.

The festively dressed women lounge on their mats and cushions, glance nervously at each other, and then brazenly begin to nibble bananas. Kaahumanu and Keopuolani, both dressed in shimmering yellow satin *p'aus*, take their seats at the women's table, leaving one cushion and placesetting next to them mysteriously empty. Kaahumanu reclines on her pillows and lights her English-

style pipe. She is waiting for the King.

Handsome young Liholiho arrives at last, dressed in his bright red, European-style military uniform. Slowly and stiffly, he circles the men's and the women's tables. The men fidget in their seats and eye him anxiously. Then he drops down onto the one empty cushion next to the women. With his heart pounding in his chest, Liholiho takes food in his hand, slowly raises his hand toward his mouth, and eats.

Silence descends on the shocked crowd. Never in their lives have they seen a king eating food while sitting at a table with women. Most hold their breath, expecting punishment from the gods.

Suddenly from the women's table come loud screams. "Ai Noa! Free eating!" they shout. The women jump up and hug each other, cry, and laugh. "The gods are false!" they shout. "The *kapus* are broken!"

It is a great victory for the women, and for all the men who have suffered under the *kapu* system, too. And before the day is out the women will win much more than women's right to eat bananas and steamed pig.

At feast's end, Kaahumanu and Liholiho, together, issue orders for all the *heiaus*, or temples, and their carved religious idols to be destroyed. The implications are enormous. The entire *kapu* system, the priesthood, and the religious, political, and social system it supported for hundreds of years, is to be ended. Kaahumanu's revolution is not accomplished without opposition, but, although she herself is forced to take to the sea in command of war canoes to defend her gains, she is eventually successful. An ancient form of discrimination against women is overturned forever.

(Kaahumanu continued to rule Hawaiian politics for many years to come, serving as Kuhina Nui for Liholiho until his death in 1824, and governing as Regent for the eight-year-old boy, Hauikeaouli, who was crowned next as King Kamehameha III.)

In Hawaii today, this great Queen is remembered fondly for being one of the few women in history to make a success-

ful revolution in defense of women's rights. Even more, she is loved as a symbol of Hawaii's golden age, when the land was still run by the Hawaiians, and not by a foreign power as it is today.

We in the mainland United States would do well to remember Kaahumanu as a woman who was monumental in matters of love, politics, and physical stature. For this great Queen, a three-hundred-pound body was a powerful asset, both for gaining new lovers and for acquiring greater political power. To be large was to be beautiful. Taking up space, in all respects, was the best policy.

We should especially remember this aspect of Kaahumanu's history, for we live at a time when women's increased



political, economic, and social power is accompanied by strong cultural demands, too often accepted by women, that they *diminish* their body size. As women gain more and more economically and politically, they take up less and less space physically.

We need to know that there was a time and place in history when women were allowed to be grandly powerful without paying such a price. We should honor Kaahumanu, and give thought to breaking our own society's destructive eating *kapus* for women. ♦

Susan Ribner is the Director of the Women's Center Karate Club in NYC. She is currently writing a young adult book on women warriors in history.

BULLETS

by Melinda Goodman

They told me as a baby
I started throwing up
the formula they gave me
in the cab home from the hospital
Everything that went down
came up
"Projectile vomiting," my mother says clinically
like girls with no seat belts
get thrown through the windshield
"Like a geyser," my father says laughing
I think of Yellowstone Park
Yogi Bear and Boo Boo
Augie Doggie Doggie Daddy

Lifting for take off
between my father and my sister
my first plane ride in this life
propellers cut the air
like my mother's Waring blender
mean as a lawn mower
on the Comet kitchen counter
the stewardess gives my father wings
to pin to our velvet chests
"Junior Pilots," he says
but I am too green
to know what that all means
flying through my first legitimate cloud
I throw up in my sister's lap
black velvet dress in the seat beside me
3rd grade, 4th grade,
5th grade, 6th

my vomit takes the paint off
my mother's car door
Plymouth wagon
PLY MOUTH
I say sounding out the word
running my finger tip
over the hard chrome letters
like bullets
I may not be the oldest
the youngest
or the only boy
but doors fly open
when I say stop

Sweet sixteen sticks
my fist down my throat
standing alone in the locked bathroom
I learn to cover up the sound
with water running
face in the mirror purple
tooth marks on my knuckles
undigested food whirling
in the porcelain bowl
like the baby Mommy lost
after my sister before I was born
delivered in the toilet
the doctor said to save it
but Mom flushed it anyway
to the Hudson River
Atlantic Ocean
swathed in toilet paper
like a mummy
invisible man in bandages
if you had been born
I wouldn't have to be here
now

always checking
for vomit in my hair
on my shoes
washing up
washing off
covering my tracks
swabbing the inner rim
get it off get it out

I come back to the table
smiling
ready to continue our talk
like I haven't just napalmed
my own village
raped my own child

washed my own mouth out
with a fistful of soap

Melinda Goodman is a Manhattan-born Lesbian poet. She has recently completed a collection of her poems entitled *Middle Sister*.

Nina Kuo teaches at the Asian Arts Institute, NYC, and, in her work, investigates the fusion of Asian cultures.

Mari Ketes Reinke is a poet and performance artist born in Madison, WI, where she continues to work.

Nina Kuo,
untitled photograph



TOILET BRAG by Mari Ketes Reinke

For over five years we have sat at this table
although they keep changing, the position remains
one hand on the belly, one leg bent up, mouth open
empty bowls and scraped plates.

It is very late and nothing brings relief
nothing.

Sleep is evasive and maybe if I eat one more
round, throw up one more time the body
will collapse

and give me rest. I've begun prayer to quit
this pounding, yes given in to the mind, trying
desperately to STOP.

But nothing happens, lying there on a towel in the bathroom
painfully quiet, hoping no one heard
the heaving of a woman leaving
her body again.

I read an article yesterday about Bulimia it said
we average white woman age 25 puke a few times a week
or if SEVERE maybe 3 times a day, once a meal, neat.

They never met me. Some of us brag about 25 times to the
toilet

in one glorious day miserable.
rung dry.

Dr. Steinhopf's
 clinic has changed the
 lives of famous comedians
 and governors' wives. Turn on
 any talk show. Formerly obese people
 dressed in tiny little designer originals are
 sitting in those skinny little Marcel Breuer
 chairs, and they're telling Johnny or Merv or
 Dinah about the joys of weighing less. ¶ They
 make it sound very easy, those governors'
 wives and comedians. They gab about all
 the funny pranks people played on
 each other down here, how they
 were all one big fat hap-
 py family. They tell how
 somebody ordered five
 hundred pizzas and had them sent

FORMERLY

FAT

by Susan Thomas

to Dr. Steinhopf. They tell how someone
 poured salt in all the urine samples of the people
 on salt-free diets. Oh, sure, they all had a jolly old
 time. ¶ But they don't tell about that deep hole they have down
 there and how it feels like it's going to swallow you if you don't eat some-
 thing. You're falling and it's dark and cold and voices are telling you, "Eat something,
 eat, for God's sake, or you're gonna die." On the way down you grab at donuts, brownies,
 muffins, anything to slow the fall. But they all disappear in your hand. It's just you and
 nothing. They all must have seen that hole, all those famous skinny people, but nobody told
 me. ¶ We came together, my sister Michelle and I, a year and a half ago, to this town they call the
 Fat Capital of the World. You've probably seen us on T.V. You know that Alka-Seltzer commercial,
 the one with the red-haired twins who weigh three hundred pounds apiece? And they're lying on a
 couch going, "Oy, have I got a stomach ache!"? That's us, me and my sister Michelle. You'd know us
 anywhere, right? ¶ Only now it's just me, and I'm sitting on my bed in a pile of Hostess Twinkies, and the
 despair I am feeling keeps me stuffing things into my mouth with a vengeance that you'd never understand.
 That's why I am trying to tell you this story. So you won't think I just have no self-control. ¶ I am falling
 through the space of my own body, through the empty space where there ought to be a person. Shrunk
 half my former size and half again less without my sister, I can't even find the me that is left. I must be
 here someplace on this bed with all these Hostess Twinkies. ¶ In the past four days I have devoured eight
 buckets of chicken, four buckets of ribs, a whole brisket from the delicatessen, eight loaves of rye bread,
 five pounds of no-salt butter, six gallons of milk, six quarts of Carvel, and the contents of three vending
 machines. Never mind what was in them, I don't think I even noticed. ¶ And where is Michelle, my
 other half, my sister? Where is she now, when I need her more than ever? I, who beat up Harriet
 Reinstein in the third grade for pulling her beautiful braids? I, who bore the brunt with her of every fat joke
 known to man and cruel child? I, who endured with her the dreariness of the Chubby Shop and the Lane
 Bryant catalog? ¶ I'll tell you where Michelle is. She's on her honeymoon, with Tony, our agent, that two-timing
 fairweather friend. On her honeymoon in Bermuda, while I, poor doubly-jilted monster, eat myself into oblivion in
 Easton, South Carolina. ¶ Formerly we were go-go dancers, Michelle and I. A profession so grueling we should have
 been awarded Olympic medals every time we finished our act. We met Tony the night we were working the Pilgrim
 Theatre in Boston, as a warm-up act for Fanne Fox. It was also the night that Wilbur Mills showed up onstage, and the
 photos of us being hugged by him in the papers the next morning would have clinched our career for sure. But that night
 we took up with Tony, and we left burlesque forever. ¶ I kept noticing Tony in the audience. Night after night he sat in the
 first row and ate Hershey's Kisses. He unwrapped each one and put it in his mouth. Then he rolled the silver into a ball with the
 paper tag on the inside and put it in the pocket of his shirt. What did he do with all those little balls? I also noticed he was
 handsome and sexy and, while we were dancing, I'd watch him and taste the chocolate with that pointy little nub poking the
 roof of my mouth. I'd smile at him and aim a few bumps in his direction. It seemed to me he smiled back, a special appreciation
 of my art. ¶ Later, when we left the theatre that last night, he was standing outside on Washington Street. I would have
 recognized him anywhere, with that white-toothed smile, those soft brown eyes, that pocket full of little silver balls. ¶ "Hey,"
 he said, "How ya doin'?" ¶ Michelle turned her back. I smiled at him. ¶ "Name's Anthony Positano. I've been catching your
 act all week. Fabulous. I think you're terrific." ¶ "Ignore him, Barbara," said Michelle. "Stop smiling." ¶ "Hey, gimme a
 break, girls. Steve Legari called me last week and told me to come down here and take a..." ¶ "Oh," said Michelle.
 "That's different. Why didn't you say it was business? You're the agent from Talent Associates?" ¶ She put her hand into
 the one he had stretched out. He put his other one over hers like it was a sandwich. ¶ "It's a pleasure to meet you. Like I
 said, Steve called T.A. and told me to take a look at your act. I'm trying to branch out on my own, and I guess the word is out
 on me." ¶ "Do you think you could get us anything in New York? Boston is getting ridiculous," said Michelle. ¶ "Sure. I
 could book you into a strip joint next week, if you want. But listen. I've got something else in mind. I'm just trying to get my

contacts together, and then I plan to expand into media advertising."

"Media advertising?" said Michelle.

"Yeah. You know, like TV, radio commercials, magazine layouts. This buddy of mine just shot that Alpo commercial, you know, where the dogs are doing the hustle at Studio 54? And he's looking for some talent for his next job."

"You want us for an Alpo commercial?"

"No, no, of course not. This one is Alka-Seltzer. You'd be perfect."

"Yeah, well, O.K.," said Michelle. "It was nice meeting you. We really have to get home now. Give Steve a call if something comes up."

She shot out her arm for a taxi, and one screeched to a stop. Then Tony shook hands again with her and then with me, still making those nice sandwiches.

When we were sitting in the cab, I looked back at him and I realized why I liked his smile so much. He didn't look at us like we were freaks.

"Stupid son-of-a-bitch," said Michelle. "Alpo commercials. What does Legari think he's doing sending this creep down here?"

"I thought he was nice," I said. "What are you going to tell Steve to say when he calls him?"

"Don't worry, Barbara, he won't call."

Michelle is very smart, but she's no fortune teller. We've been eating off the royalties on "Oy, have we got a stomach ache" for two and one half years now.

Two hundred pounds became three hundred in the bright lights of the studio and the dim ones of Elaine's, where we went every night for dinner. Without our dancing to keep our weight down, Michelle and I blew up like balloons. But if we were popular at two hundred, our accounts loved us at three.

By the time our lavish bodies appeared in a zipper ad in the New York Times Magazine Section (backs of our dresses unzipped while standing under a marquee in Shubert Alley, captioned "Last night the La Grande Sisters opened on Broadway—Next time they'll use Zippy Zippers"), we weighed three hundred fifty pounds apiece. And our Zippy account loved every pound.

But then we went beyond the numbers on the scale, and Michelle's varicose veins got so bad she could hardly stand on her feet for ten minutes. Tony got worried and sent us down here to Dr. Steinhopf.

First they put us in the hospital and stuck our arms with needles all day long. Liver function tests, kidney function tests, fasting blood sugars, pissing blood sugars, x-rays, gamma rays. You name it, they did it to us. The hospital floor was painted with yellow footprints to show us how to get from one test to another. At the end of the two days of testing Dr. Steinhopf told us we would now take the most important test of all, the Doorway test. If we got through it, we could live at the Holiday Inn and go about exercising on our own, reporting to Dr. Steinhopf only in the morning to deliver our urine specimens and be weighed.

But if we failed, we would be put into the hospital for twenty-four-hour observation and total fasting until we could pass the test.

We failed. We could only make it through the Dining Room doorway by turning sideways and holding our breath, and that was considered cheating.

They put us in hospital johnnies in adjoining rooms and fed us intravenous fluids for three days. We tried to call to each other through the wall and to sneak into each other's rooms, but with the problems of holding the hospital johnnies together and the clanking of the I.V. bottles, we couldn't be

unobtrusive. The nurses and orderlies always caught us and led us back to bed.

I pictured Michelle in the next room, tied like me into three regulation nightgowns and hallucinating food. Pizza and chocolate cake danced on my ceiling, and the television seemed to say, "Chow-time!" every time I pushed the remote control. I dreamed my bed was a bathtub full of chicken and woke up to find my teeth sunk into my arm. I was nauseous, frightened, hungry, panicked. The only thing that kept me from banging my head on the wall was the thought of Michelle next door, like a reflection in the mirror that went all the way inside. I looked at my hand and saw her hand. I looked at my leg and saw hers. Inside I felt hollow, and I knew that she did too. It was like the Lincoln Tunnel from my room to hers.

Then they took out the intravenous tubes and told us we could walk around the corridor. I ran into Michelle's room, but it was empty. They'd removed her I.V. an hour before. I was worried. Maybe she went crazy and escaped as soon as they unhooked her. Why else would she have stayed away from me?

But two minutes later I found her down the hall, playing cards with another patient. They called him The Howling Wolf on account of the noises he made when he was eating. Michelle told me later that Dr. Steinhopf had put him back in the hospital after the Wolf had ordered eight dozen Dunkin' Donuts for a church bazaar and eaten them all himself on the ten-minute drive to the church.

"Barbara," she said to me, "Wasn't that wild? What was in those bottles, anyway? I kept feeling like I was high or something. Man, you should have seen all that stuff I kept dreaming up."

"Yeah," I said, "Like pizzas and cake and everything, right? It's the fasting that does it."

"No, I mean the other stuff. I saw myself melting. Like all my fat melting off me and making a big puddle of butter on the floor. And when it was all melted, I was gorgeous. I had this gold bikini on, and there were all these palm trees around me. It was terrific. You should have seen it."

All of a sudden I wanted to cry. Why was it different for her? Weren't we twins anymore? Weren't we exactly the same?

"Oh yeah, right," I said, "Those things. Yeah, I remember that. My bikini was silver. But I'm glad that's over. What do they give us for dinner?"

The Wolf laughed, I think. But it sounded more like a low shriek with a wheeze at the end. His mouth was a tiny O in a mountain of cheeks and chin.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news," said Michelle, "but they don't feed us anything while we're still in the hospital. We don't get anything until we've gone through the doorway to the Dining Room." She pulled the johnny tighter around her.

I didn't believe her. How could she say that so blithely and mean it?

"Come on, Michelle, I can't take any jokes right now. I've never felt so weak in my life."

Michelle looked at me hard.

"It's no joke, Barbara. You'd better get used to it now, because you're going to be hungry from now on, until we leave this town."

The tears rolled down my cheeks, and I licked them. My first taste of salt since I came to this place. And practically my last. The diet is so salt-poor that even your tears and your sweat become tasteless.

"Oh, Michelle," I said, "How can you be so casual about it? Don't you feel like you're dying?"

"No," she said, and I'll never forget that look she gave me, a look that said, 'Every man for himself.' "No, I feel like I'm

gonna start looking after myself. Like, for once in my life, I'm gonna live for me."

Eleven days later we had each lost forty pounds and could pass frontally through the portals of the Dining Room. There we found one hundred and thirty fellow sufferers, each weighing in excess of two hundred pounds. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the Dining Room, as we entered it for the first time, contained upwards of thirty thousand pounds of human flesh. They were all eating rice.

We were allowed one cup of rice for lunch and one cup of rice for supper, accompanied each time by two limp fruits. For breakfast there was a half grapefruit, but we were encouraged not to eat it.

After breakfast everyone put on shorts and walked the three-mile wall that encircles the hospital and university campus. The Easton shopkeepers specialize in what they call "half sizes." Michele and I, for example, went out and bought ourselves size 46½ Bermuda shorts and walked around the wall three times. Just as I was ready to plunk myself down in the grass, Michelle grabbed hold of my hand and jerked me to my feet.

"You're not quitting now, are you?"

"Michelle, have a heart. I'm ready to pass out. Come on, take a break and sit down with me."

"Not me, Barbara. I'm not a quitter. I'll pick you up next time around."

But by her next time around I was half a mile away at Jerry's Nut House, slobbering over the selection of cashews and pistachios in the window. I'd heard of this place from other pa-

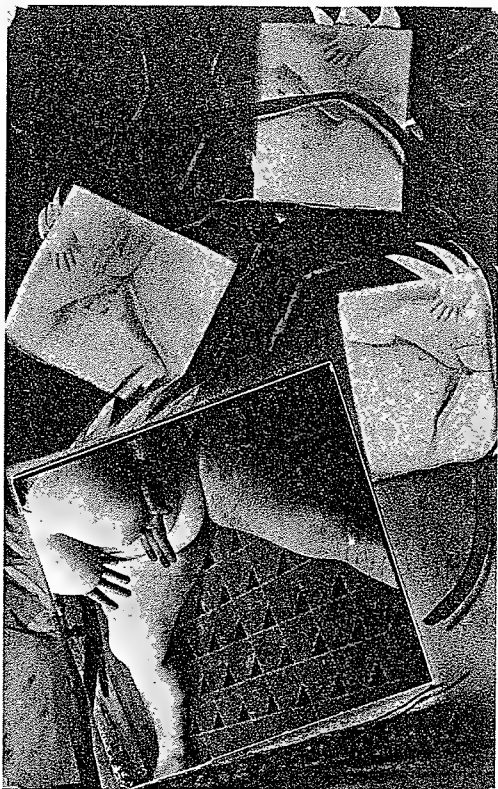
tients, the ones who are labelled "cheaters," but no one had ever told me where it was. I have a nose for these things. How could I know I'd bump into it on my short cut to the Holiday Inn?

I got back to my motel room an hour later with two half-bound bags of Indian nuts stuffed in the cups of my bra. Michelle was already swimming laps in the pool. Surrounding her were twenty or thirty other women of the obese persuasion, sunning themselves happily, in size 42½ pastel bikinis. Traveling salesmen and other motel guests not connected with Dr. Steinhopf's program stood around drinking beer and staring at the landscape. It was hard not to! Even I, in the modesty of my Bermuda shorts and Indian nuts, couldn't take my eyes off the group around the pool.

Life went on without food. After a year, Michelle had lost two hundred pounds. I lagged behind at one hundred forty off and one hundred forty still to go. Michelle had bought herself a whole new wardrobe, and I could hear her dressing and undressing late at night while I lay in bed pretending to sleep.

"Mmmm, you're so gorgeous," she whispered to herself. She closed her eyes and kissed her reflection in the mirror.

She demanded more space in the world.



Her body expanded, making lavish personal statements that intruded upon the intimate thoughts of others.



As she walked her thighs touched, creating warm worn spots in the fabric of her garments.

"Oh, Michelle," she sighed. "Darling, my darling."

Later on her bed would rock until her breaths came sharp and her sighs were high-pitched screeches.

In November they put me back on intravenous fluids. I'd reached a plateau and stayed there for a month. How could I eat less? How could I exercise more? Already I was walking fourteen miles a day, swimming sixty laps and doing calisthenics.

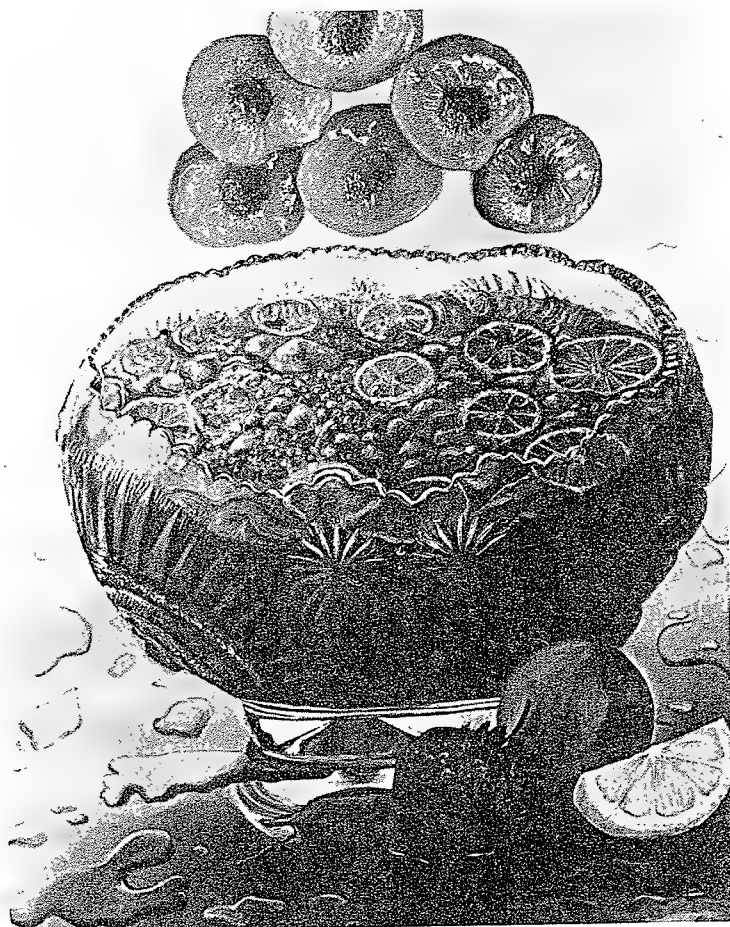
I panicked and ate a two-pound bag of salted peanuts. I checked into the Dining Room the next morning weighing ten

4 At the restaurant my mother falls upon the rolls. "Thank God! I was starving," she says, her mouth full of dough. She bites into a hamburger, her long red nails digging into the soft bun, and shoves french fries and onion rings into her mouth while I push around a diet soda. After the plates are cleared away she orders cheesecake asking the waitress to bring her two packets of Sweet 'n' Low: one for her coffee and one for her purse. When we get home we each migrate towards our own bedroom like homing pigeons lighting on a branch for the night. Before I fall asleep I run my hands along my body feeling my collarbones, sharp as swords, my belly curving inward like an empty boat, my hipbones jutting out like rocks along a jagged shore. I sleep like a baby in a cradle or a hammock or a spoon being lifted towards a pair of red lips two rows of yellow teeth and a tongue curled like a finger beckoning me to enter the thick warm darkness behind it.

5 Mama I never called you Mama though I always wanted to. Mama, will you tell me you love me? Will you tell me you think I'm strong and beautiful? All I remember was you telling me to lose weight, do something with my hair and put on a brassiere. Mama, tell me you're proud of me for living on my own because that's what you taught me the whole time you shlepped us kids round to dance classes and Hebrew school, whenever you made supper and did the dishes, each time you picked up Papa's suits from the cleaners and his socks from the floor the creases between your eyebrows were saying: I don't want to be doing this. The little lines that pulled at the side of your mouth were saying: I can't stand this. And the sighs that escaped your lips

Gilah Hirsch has a year's sabbatical from Cal State-Dominguez Hills and is currently traveling alone through Asia.

everytime you stubbed out a cigarette were saying: Only a fool would settle for this. Mama don't you see I listened to you? For once in my life I'll admit you were right. Mama, come sit at my table and tell me stories about when I was a little girl, how I was born with thick black hair long enough for a ponytail, how the nurses all took turns combing it and how you cried because you were so happy I was a girl.



Gilah Hirsch, *Miracle of the Peaches*, oil.

Mama tell me about you and Papa, how he'd lie on the floor with his hands under his head his eyes closed while you played the piano and Grandma fried blintzes in the kitchen. Mama I am hungry for these stories of how we all loved each other. I want to hear them again and again so I can pretend I remember.

Who's holding this ferocious-looking 25-pound monkfish of which only the tail is edible and prized?



1

This famous Australian soprano struck a pair of culinary high notes by having two of Escoffier's most famous creations—pêche Melba and Melba toast—named after her.



2

Too famous for words.

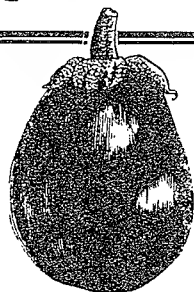


3

Perched on an elegantly decorated cake, this lady was a monument to the confectioner's art and to true love. The cake was made for the wedding of the Princess Royal of Britain to Prince Frederick William of Prussia. Usually seen next to a groom, she can now be seen next to a Lesbian bride at alternative lifestyle weddings.



4



NAME THAT

Who Are These Famous Food Women?

9



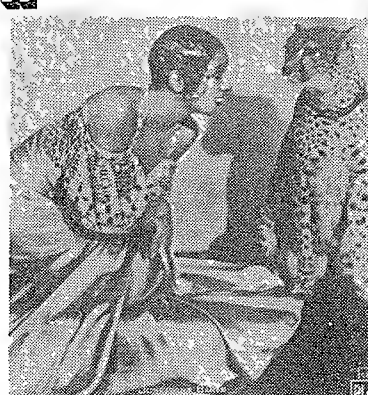
A Los Angeles-based performance art group serving nuclear cocktails in *Duck and Cover*.

10



Who is this controversial stereotype created by white boys, who has inspired a kitchen full of analytical books and critical papers?

11



The One Who Wouldn't Be Stereotyped

Her recipe for Success:

Refuse the pinch of clowning in segregated vaudeville.

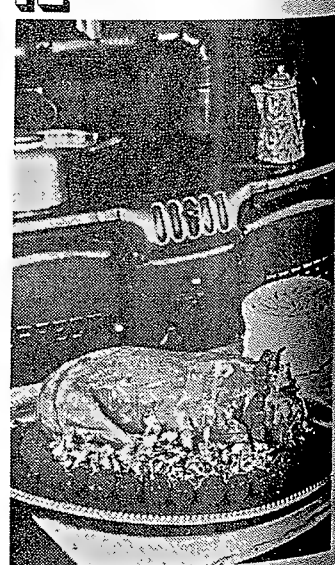
Fold American career.

Add Paris. Whip the Europeans into ecstatic peaks.

Crush racism.

Feed to nearly 20 adopted children from all parts of the world.

12



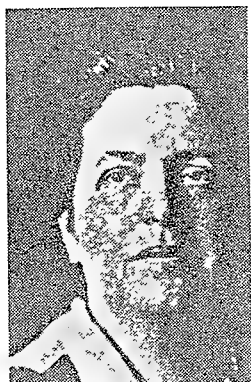
This roast suckling pig was her husband's favorite dinner served after musicales she held Friday evenings for invited guests numbering between 250 to 500.

This French actress inspired Escoffier to scramble eggs with garlic and to create a soup, a strawberry dessert, and a soufflé with strawberries, as well as Curaçao and macaroons.



3

She founded the initial *settlement house*, Henry Street, on New York's lower east side, to feed, nurse, and educate immigrant families.



6

A novelty of Flora Peake Holtz's extravagant Candy Ball, given on the eve of her husband's financial disaster, in the motion picture, *The Golden Bed* (1925).



7

This narrow-waisted woman had one rib removed to give her *doll-like* appeal. She literally pinched herself to death.



8

DAME

A work-in-progress placemat for *AMERICAN DINING: LABORS IN THE 80s*. A site specific art installation in diners, including audio works of labor stories and music programmed in diner booth jukeboxes, with accompanying set of four placemats.

© 1987, JERRI ALLYN/ARTIST

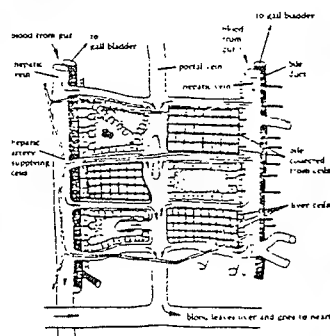
- 1 Julia Child (1912 -)
- 2 Nellie Melba (1861-1931)
- 3 Carmen Miranda (1913-1955)
- 4 Wedding Cake Bride (1832)
- 5 Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923)
- 6 Lillian Wald (1867-1940)
- 7 Marshmallow Girl (1923)
- 8 Anna Held (1865-1918)
- 9 The Waitresses (1978-1986)
- 10 Aunt Jemima
- 11 Josephine Baker (1906-1975)
- 12 First Lady Edith Roosevelt (1861-1948)
- 13 Eiko Ando (1934 -)
- 14 Adele Davis
- 15 Betty Crocker (1936 -)
- 16 Aunt Sammy (1926-1944)

13



The infamous "waitress" of all—the geisha. Who is this one serving the infamous "Duke" in *The Barbarian and The Geisha*.

14



"Why is the liver so important?" Quote and diagram from *Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit*. Even though she had us eating vegetables within five minutes of picking them and also wrote *Let's Stay Healthy*, *Let's Get Well*, and *A Guide to Lifelong Nutrition*, she died of cancer in her 50's.

15



In 1936, 1955, 1965, 1968, 1972, and now. She loses her 'do' and gets a job. General Mills updates its famous homemaker in better-late-than-never recognition of women who work outside, as well as inside, the home.

16



This mature, wise-cracking wife to Uncle Sam, affecting a flapper's bob, who sprang full-blown from the imagination of her creators in 1926, spent 15 minutes every day guiding the Housewife through the grim realities of the 1930s with *Radio Recipes*, on the *Housekeeper's Chat*.

T U N A

I was ten and my sister seven. We were at the kitchen table waiting. My mother put plates down and cups of milk. There were tuna fish sandwiches. My sister bit into the Wonder bread and said, "This is too dry. There's not enough mayonnaise." I agreed. My mother took the sandwiches apart and mixed the tuna with more mayonnaise in a blue plastic bowl. The plates were in front of us again. My sister said, "This is too lumpy." My mother got very red. The color started in her neck and moved over her face. She tore the sandwiches apart. She put the tuna in the blender and set it on puree. It made a lot of noise. My mother didn't make any noise. The sandwiches were in front of us again. Susan took a bite and said, "I can't eat this. It tastes like cat food." I didn't want to eat it either. My mother said, "You had better eat it, or I'm going to stuff it down your throat." I started crying. I swallowed mouthfuls of bread and paste. My sister wouldn't eat it, and my mother stuffed it down her throat.

— NANCY KRICORIAN

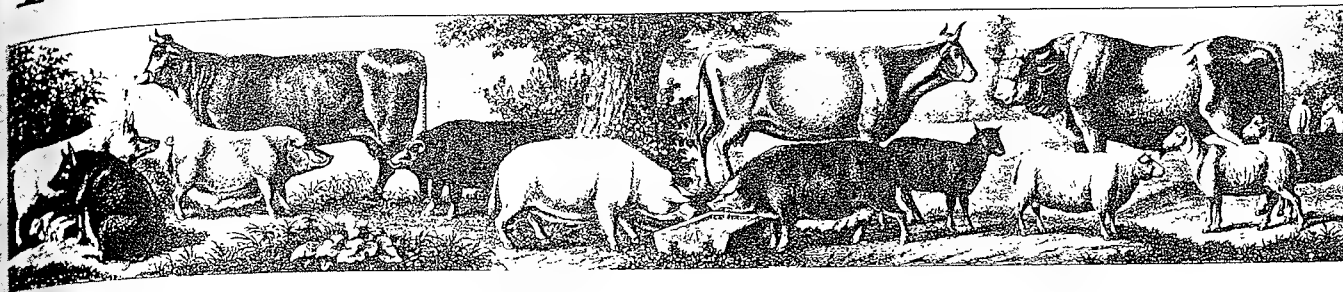
Iris Falck, Maya and the Crabs, b&w photograph



Nancy Kricorian is a graduate student in Columbia University's Writing Division program.

Iris Falck is a bilingual teacher in Providence, RI. She recently helped build a health clinic in Niquinohomo, Nicaragua, in a sister city project.

The Sexual Politics of



MEAT

BY CAROL ADAMS

I left the British Library, where I was doing research on some women of the 1890s whose feminist working-class newspaper advocated meatless diets, and went through the cafeteria line in a restaurant nearby. Vegetarian food in hand, I descended to the basement. A painting of Henry VIII eating a steak and kidney pie greeted my gaze. On either side of the consuming Henry were portraits of his six wives and other women. However, they were not eating steak and kidney pie, nor anything made of meat. Catherine of Aragon held an apple in her hands. The Countess of Mar had a turnip, Anne Boleyn—red grapes, Anne of Cleves—a pear, Jane Seymour—blue grapes, Catherine Howard—a carrot, Catherine Parr—a cabbage.

People with power have always eaten meat. The aristocracy of Europe consumed large courses filled with every kind of meat, while the laborers consumed the complex carbohydrates. Dietary habits proclaim class distinctions, but they proclaim patriarchal distinctions as well. Women, second-class citizens, are more likely to eat what are considered to be second-class foods in a patriarchal culture: vegetables and fruits and grains, rather than meat. The sexism in meat eating recapitulates the class distinctions with an added twist: a mythology that meat is a masculine food and meat eating, a male activity, permeates all classes.

Meat-eating societies gain male identification by their choice of food, and meat textbooks heartily endorse this association. We learn from *The Meat We Eat* that "a liberal meat supply has always been associated with a happy and virile people." *Meat Technology* informs us that the "virile Australian race is a typical example of heavy meat-eaters." Leading gourmands refer "to the virile ordeal of spooning the brains directly out of a barbecued calf's head."¹ *Virile: of or having the characteristics of an adult male, from vir meaning man.* Meat eating measures individual and societal virility.

Meat is a constant for men, intermittent for women, a pattern painfully observed in famine situations today. Women are starving at a rate dispropor-

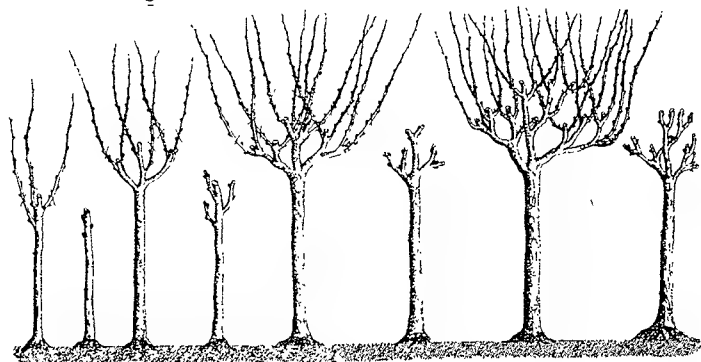
portionate to men. Lisa Leghorn and Mary Roodkowsky surveyed this phenomenon in their book *Who Really Starves: Women and World Hunger*. Women, they conclude, engage in deliberate self-deprivation, offering men the "best" foods at the expense of their own nutritional needs. For instance, they tell us that "Ethiopian women and girls of all classes are obliged to prepare two meals, one for the males and a second, often containing no meat or other substantial protein, for the females."²

In fact, men's protein needs are less than those of pregnant and nursing women, and the disproportionate distribution of the main protein source occurs when women's need for protein is the greatest. Curiously, we are now being told that one should eat meat (or fish, vegetables, chocolate, and salt) at least six weeks before becoming pregnant if one wants a boy. But if a girl is desired, no meat please, rather milk, cheese, nuts, beans, and cereals.³

Fairy tales initiate us at an early age into the dynamics of eating and sex roles. The King in his counting house ate four-and-twenty blackbirds in a pie (originally four-and-twenty naughty boys), while the Queen ate bread and honey. Cannibalism in fairy tales is generally a male activity, as Jack, after climbing his beanstalk, quickly learned. Folktales of all nations depict giants as male and "fond of eating human flesh."⁴ Witches—warped or monstrous females in the eyes of a patriarchal world—become the token female cannibals.

A Biblical example of the male prerogative for meat ranked Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leading nineteenth-century feminist, as can be seen by her terse commentary on Leviticus 6 in *The Woman's Bible*: "The meat so delicately cooked by the priests, with wood and coals in the altar, in clean linen, no woman was permitted to taste, only the males among the children of Aaron."⁵

Most food taboos address meat consumption, and they place more restrictions on women than on men. The common foods forbidden to women are chicken, duck, and pork. Forbidding meat to women in non-technological



cultures increases its prestige. Even if the women raise the pigs, as they do in the Solomon Islands, they are rarely allowed to eat the pork. When they do receive some, it is at the dispensation of their husbands.⁶ In Indonesia, "flesh food is viewed as the property of men. At feasts, the principal time when meat is available, it is distributed to households according to the men in them. . . . The system of distribution thus reinforces the prestige of men in society."⁷

Worldwide this patriarchal custom is found. In Asia, some cultures forbid women to consume fish, seafood, chicken, duck, and eggs. In equatorial Africa, the "prohibition of chicken to women is common."⁸ For example, the Mbum Kpau women do not eat chicken, goat, partridge, or other game birds. The Kufa of Ethiopia punished women who ate chicken by making them slaves, while the Walamo "put to death anyone who violated the restriction of eating fowl."

Correspondingly, vegetables and other non-meat foods are viewed as women's food. This makes them undesirable to men. The Nuer men think that eating eggs is effeminate. In other groups, men require sauces to disguise the fact that they are eating women's foods. "Men expect to have meat sauces to go with their porridge and will sometimes refuse to eat sauces made of greens or other vegetables, which are said to be women's food."¹⁰

In technological societies, cookbooks reflect the presumption that men eat meat. A random survey of cookbooks reveals that the barbecue sections of most cookbooks are addressed to men and feature meat. The foods recommended for a "Mother's Day Tea" do not include meat, but readers are advised that on Father's Day, dinner should include London Broil because "a steak dinner has unfailing popularity with fathers."¹¹ In a chapter on "Feminine Hospitality," we are directed to serve vegetables, salads, and soups. The new *McCall's* cookbook suggests that a man's favorite dinner is London broil. A "Ladies Luncheon" would consist of cheese dishes and vegetables, but no meat. A section of one cookbook entitled "For Men Only" reinforces the omnipresence of meat in men's lives. What is for men only? London broil, cubed steak, and beef dinner.¹²

Twentieth-century cookbooks only serve to confirm the historical pattern found in the nineteenth century, when British working-class families could not afford sufficient meat to feed the entire family. "For the man only" appears continually in the menus of these families when referring to meat. In adhering to the mythologies of a culture (men need meat; meat gives bull-like strength), the male "breadwinner" received the meat. Social historians continually report that the "lion's share" of meat went to the husband.

What, then, was for women during the nineteenth century? On Sundays, they might have a modest but good dinner. On the other days, their food was bread with butter or drippings, weak tea, pudding, and vegetables. One observer noted, "The wife, in very poor families, is probably the worst fed of the household." His comment was recorded in 1863 by Dr. Edward Smith in the first national food survey of British dietary habits, which revealed that the major difference in the diet of men and women in the same family was the amount of meat consumed. In one rural county of England, the investigators were told that the women and children "eat the potatoes and look at the meat."¹³

Where poverty forced a conscious distribution of meat, men received it. Many women emphasized that they had saved the meat for their husbands. They were articulating the prevailing connections between meat eating and the male role: "I keep it for him; he *has* to have it." Sample menus for South London

laborers "showed extra meat, extra fish, extra cakes, or a different quality of meat for the man." Women ate meat once a week with their children, while the husband consumed meat and bacon "almost daily," according to Smith.

Early in the present century, the Fabian Women's group in London launched a four-year study in which they recorded the daily budget of thirty families in a working-class community. These budgets were collected and explained in a compassionate book, *Round About a Pound a Week*. Here is perceived clearly the sexual politics of meat: "In the household that spends 10s [shillings] or even less on food, only one kind of diet is possible, and that is the man's diet. The children have what is left over. There must be a Sunday joint, or, if that is not possible, at least a Sunday dish of meat, in order to satisfy the father's desire for the kind of food he relishes, and most naturally, therefore, intends to have." More succinctly, we are told: "Meat is bought for the men. The leftover meat from the Sunday dinner is eaten cold by him the next day."¹⁴ Poverty also determines who carves the meat. As Cicely Hamilton discovered during this same period, women carve when they know there is not enough meat to go around.¹⁵

In situations of abundance, sex-role assumptions about meat are not so blatantly expressed. For this reason, the diets of English upper-class women and men are much more similar than the diets of upper-class women and working-class women. Moreover, with the abundance of meat available in the United States, as opposed to the restricted amount available in England, there has been enough for all, except when meat supplies were controlled. For instance, at a time when enslaved black men received half a pound of meat per day, enslaved black women often found that they received little more than a quarter pound a day at times.¹⁶

During wartime, government rationing policies reserve the right to meat for the epitome of the masculine man, the soldier. With meat rationing in effect for civilians during World War II, the per capita consumption of meat in the Army and Navy was about two-and-a-half times that of the average civilian. Russell Baker observed that World War II began a "beef madness . . . when richly fattened beef was force-fed into every putative American warrior."¹⁷ In contrast to the recipe books for civilians, which praised complex carbohydrates, cookbooks for soldiers contained variation upon variation of meat dishes. One survey conducted of four military training camps reported that the soldier consumed 131 grams of protein, 201 grams of fat, and 484 grams of carbohydrates daily.¹⁸ Hidden costs of warring masculinity are to be found in the provision of male-defined foods to the warriors.

Women are the food preparers; meat has to be cooked to be palatable for people. Thus, in a particular culture, women accede to the dietary demands of their husbands, especially when it comes to meat. The feminist surveyors of women's budgets in the early twentieth century observed:

It is quite likely that someone who had strength, wisdom, a vitality, who did not live that life in those tiny, crowded rooms, in that lack of light and air, who was not bowed with worry, but was herself economically independent of the man who earned the money, could lay out his few shillings with a better eye to a scientific food value. It is quite as likely, however, that the man who earned the money would entirely refuse the scientific food, and demand his old tasty kippers and meat.¹⁹

A discussion of nutrition during wartime contained this aside: it was one thing, they acknowledged, to demonstrate that there were many viable alternatives to meat, "but it is another to con-

vince a man who enjoys his beefsteak."²⁰ The male prerogative to eat meat is an external, observable activity implicitly reflecting a recurring fact: meat is a symbol of male dominance.

It has traditionally been felt that the working man needs meat for strength. A superstition analogous to homeopathic principles operates in this belief: in eating the muscle of strong animals, we will become strong. According to the mythology of patriarchal culture, meat promotes strength; the attributes of masculinity are achieved through eating these masculine foods. Visions of meat-eating football players, wrestlers, and boxers lumber through our brains in this equation. Though vegetarian weightlifters and athletes in other fields have demonstrated the equation to be fallacious, the mythology and the myth remain: men are strong, men need to be strong, thus men need meat. The literal evocation of male power is found in the concept of meat.

Meat is king: this noun describing meat is a noun denoting male power. Vegetables—a generic term meat-eaters use for all foods that aren't meat—have become as associated with women as meat is with men, recalling on a subconscious level the days of Woman the Gatherer. Since women have been made subsidiary in a male-dominated, meat-eating world, so has our food: the foods associated with second-class citizens are considered to be second-class protein. Just as it is thought a woman can't make it on her own, so we think that vegetables can't make a meal on their own, despite the fact that meat is only second-hand vegetables, and vegetables provide, on the average, more than twice the vitamins and minerals of meat. Meat is upheld as a powerful, irreplaceable item of food. The message is clear: the vassal vegetable should content itself with its assigned place and not attempt to dethrone king meat. After all, how can one enthrone women's foods, when women cannot be kings?

Men who decide to eschew meat eating are deemed effeminate; the failure of men to eat meat announces that they are not masculine. Nutritionist Jean Mayer suggested that "the more men sit at their desks all day, the more they want to be reassured about their maleness in eating those large slabs

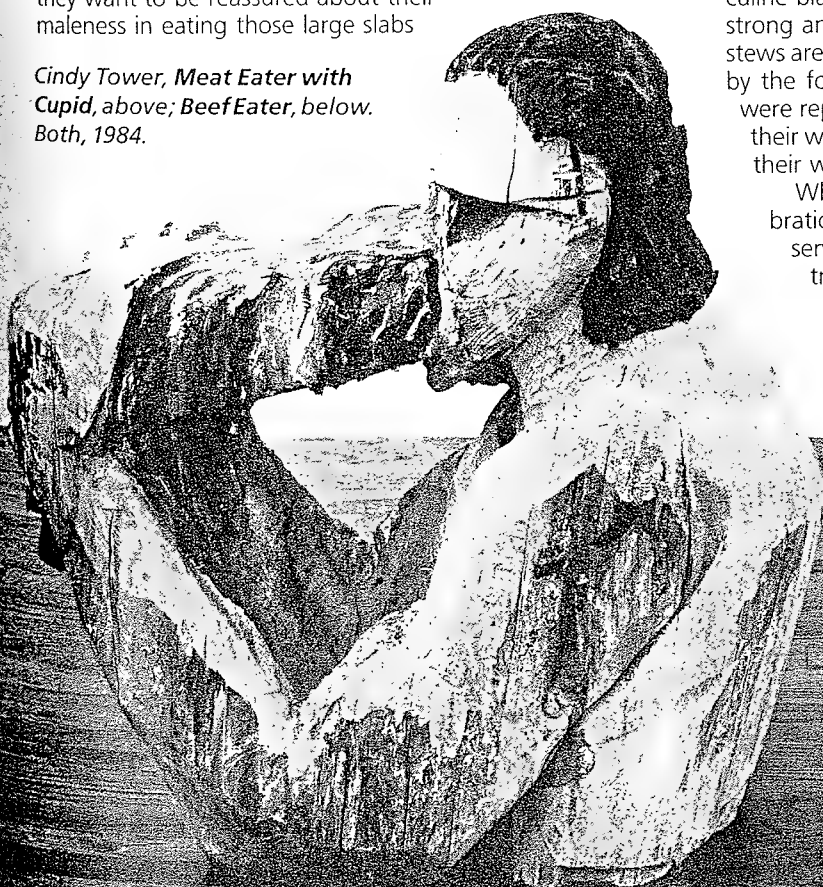
Cindy Tower, Meat Eater with Cupid, above; Beef Eater, below. Both, 1984.



of bleeding meat, which are the last symbol of machismo."²¹ The late Marty Feldman observed, "It has to do with the function of the male within our society. Football players drink beer because it's a man's drink, and eat steak because it's a man's meal. The emphasis is on 'man-sized portions,' 'hero' sandwiches; the whole terminology of meat-eating reflects this masculine bias."²² Meat-and-potatoes men are our stereotypical strong and hearty, rough and ready, able males. Hearty beef stews are named "Manhandlers." One's maleness is reassured by the food one eats. During the 1973 meat boycott, men were reported to observe the boycott when dining out with their wives or eating at home, but when they dined without their wives, they ate London broil and other meats.²³

What is it about meat that makes it a symbol and celebration of male dominance? Superficially, we might observe that the male role of hunter of meat has been transposed to the male role of eater of meat. But there is much more to meat's role as symbol than this.

Both the words "men" and "meat" have un-



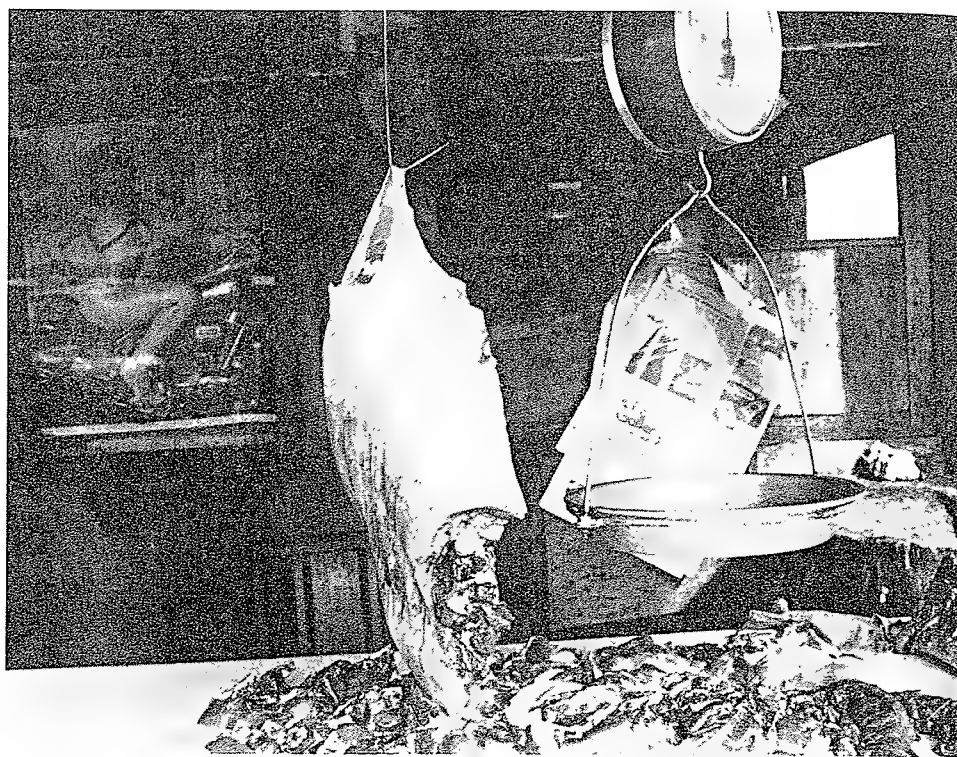
dergone lexicographical narrowing. Originally generic terms, they are now closely associated with their specific referent. Meat no longer means all foods; the word man, we realize, no longer includes women. Meat represents *the essence or principal part of something* according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*. Vegetable, on the other hand, represents the least desirable characteristics: *suggesting or like a vegetable, as in passivity or dullness of existence, monotonous, inactive*. Meat is *something one enjoys or excels in*, vegetable becomes representative of someone who doesn't enjoy anything: *a person who leads a monotonous, passive or merely physical existence*.

A complete reversal has occurred in the definition of the word vegetable. Whereas its original sense was to *be lively, active*, it is now viewed as dull, monotonous, passive. To vegetate is to lead a passive existence, just as to be feminine is to lead a passive existence. Once vegetables are viewed as women's food, by association they become viewed as "feminine," passive.

Men's need to disassociate themselves from women's food (as in the myth in which the last Bushman flees in the direction opposite from women and their vegetable food) has been institutionalized in sexist attitudes toward vegetables, and the word vegetable is used to express criticism or disdain. Colloquially, it is a synonym for a person severely brain-damaged or in a coma. In addition, vegetables are thought to have a tranquilizing, dulling, numbing effect on people who consume them, and so, we can't possibly get strength from them. According to this perverse incarnation of Brillat-Savarin's theory that you are what you eat, to eat a vegetable is to become a vegetable.

In her essay, "Deciphering a Meal," the noted anthropologist Mary Douglas suggests that the order in which we serve foods, and the food we insist on being present at a meal, reflect a taxonomy of classification which mirrors and reinforces our larger culture. A meal is an amalgam of food dishes, each a constituent part of the whole, each with an assigned value. In addition, each dish is introduced in a precise order. A meal does not begin with dessert, nor end with soup. All is seen as leading up to and then coming down from the entree, which is meat. The pattern is evidence of stability. As Douglas explains, "The ordered system which is a meal represents all the ordered systems associated with it. Hence the strong arousal power of a threat to weaken or confuse that category."²⁴ To remove meat is to threaten the structure of the large patriarchal culture.

Marabel Morgan, one expert on how women should accede to every male desire, reported in her *Total Woman Cookbook* that one must be careful about introducing foods which are seen as a threat: "I discovered that Charlie seemed threatened by certain foods. He was suspicious of my casseroles, thinking I had sneaked in some wheat germ or 'good-for-



Pennelope Goodfriend, color photograph.

you' vegetables that he wouldn't like."²⁵

Mary McCarthy's *Birds of America* provides a fictional illustration of the intimidating aspect to a male of woman's refusal of meat. Miss Scott, a vegetarian, is invited to a NATO General's house for Thanksgiving. Her refusal of turkey angers the General. Not able to take this rejection seriously, as male dominance requires a continual recollection of itself on everyone's plate, the General loads her plate up with turkey and then ladles gravy over the potatoes as well as the meat, contaminating her subsidiary foods as well. McCarthy's description of his actions with the food mirrors the war-like customs associated with military battles. "He had seized the gravy boat like a weapon in hand-to-hand combat. No wonder they had made him a Brigadier General—at least that mystery was solved." The General continues to behave in a bellicose fashion and, after dinner, proposes a toast in honor of an eighteen-year-old who has enlisted to fight in Vietnam with the rhetorical question: "What's so sacred about a civilian?" This upsets the hero, necessitating that the General's wife apologize for her husband's behavior: "Between you and me," she confides in him, "it kind of got under his skin to see that girl refusing to touch her food. I saw that right away."²⁶

Male belligerence in this area is not limited to fictional military men. Husbands who batter their wives—who, according to social scientists, are insecure men who feel powerless and not sufficiently masculine—have often been triggered to do violence against women by the absence of meat.

This is not to say that women's failure to serve meat is the cause of the violence against them. This is patently not true. The true cause of a gun going off is not the trigger. The causes of domestic violence reside within the batterer and male-dominated society.²⁷ Yet, as a trigger to this accepted violence, meat is hardly a trivial item. "Real" men eat meat. Failing to honor the importance of this symbol catalyzes male rage. As

one battered woman reported, "It would start off with him being angry over trivial little things, a trivial little thing like cheese instead of meat on a sandwich."²⁸ Another battered wife stated, "A month ago he threw scalding water over me, leaving a scar on my right arm, all because I gave him a pie with potatoes and vegetables for his dinner, instead of fresh meat."²⁹

Men who become vegetarians challenge an essential part of the masculine role. They are opting for women's food. How dare they? Refusing meat means a man is effeminate, a "sissy," a "fruit." Indeed, in 1836, one response to the vegetarian regimen of that day, known as Grahamism, charges that "Emasculation is the first fruit of Grahamism."³⁰

Choosing not to eat meat means that men repudiate their masculine privileges. *The New York Times* explored this idea in an editorial on the masculine nature of meat-eating. Instead of "the John Wayne type," epitome of the masculine meat-eater, the new male hero is "vulnerable" like Alan Alda, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and Phil Donahue. According to the *Times*, they might eat fish and chicken, but not red meat. Alda and Donahue, among other men, have not only repudiated macho food but also the macho role. Writes the editor, "Believe me, the end of macho marks the end of the meat and potatoes man."³¹ Believe me, we won't miss either.

1 Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont, *Eating in America: A History*, (New York: William Morrow, 1976), p. 279

2 Lisa Leghorn and Mary Roodkowsky, *Who Really Starves: Women and World Hunger*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1977), p. 21.

3 Lloyd Shearer, "Intelligence Report: Does Diet Determine Sex?", summarizing the conclusions of Dr. Joseph Stolkowski. *Parade Magazine*, June 27, 1982, p. 7.

4 William and Cecil Baring Gould, *The Annotated Mother Goose*, (New York: Bramhall House, 1962), p. 103.

5 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, (Seattle: Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, 1974, reprint of the 1898 edition published in New York by European Publishing Co.), p. 91

6 Frederick J. Simoons, *Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances in the Old World*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1967), pp. 108

7 Leghorn and Roodkowsky, *Who Really Starves: Women and World Hunger*, p. 20.

8 Simoons, p. 73.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Bridget O'Laughlin, "Mediation of Contradiction: Why Mbum Women do not eat Chicken" in Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, *Woman, Culture and Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 303.

11 Sunset Books and Sunset Magazines, *Sunset Menu Cook Book*, (Menlo Park, Ca.: Lane Magazine and Book Co., 1969), pp. 139, 140.

12 *Oriental Cookery* from ChunKing and Mazola Corn Oil. This cookbook was called to my attention by Karen Lindsey.

13 Dr. Edward Smith, *Practical Dietary for Families, Schools, and the Labouring Classes*, (London: Walton and Matherly, 1864).

14 Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week*, (London: Virago Press, 1979, reprint of 1913 edition published by G. Bell and Sons), pp. 144, 97, 113, et seq.

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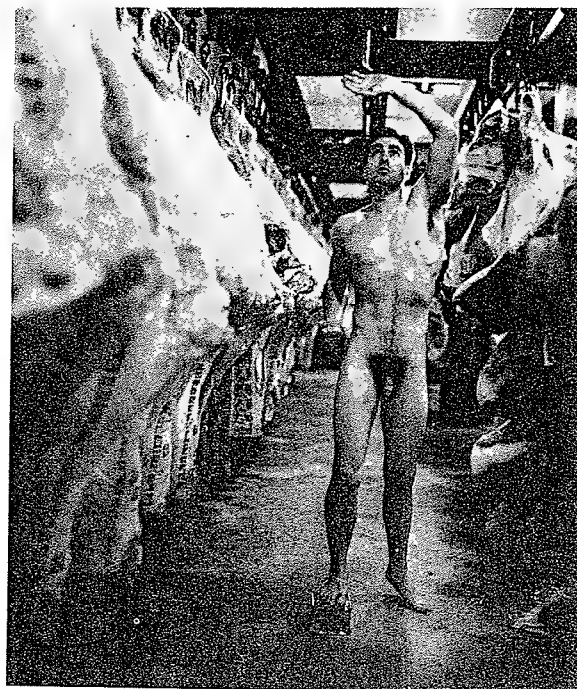


Carol Adams is an activist living in rural upstate New York. She is completing a manuscript on "A Feminist Theory of Meat Eating" and has been a vegetarian since 1974.

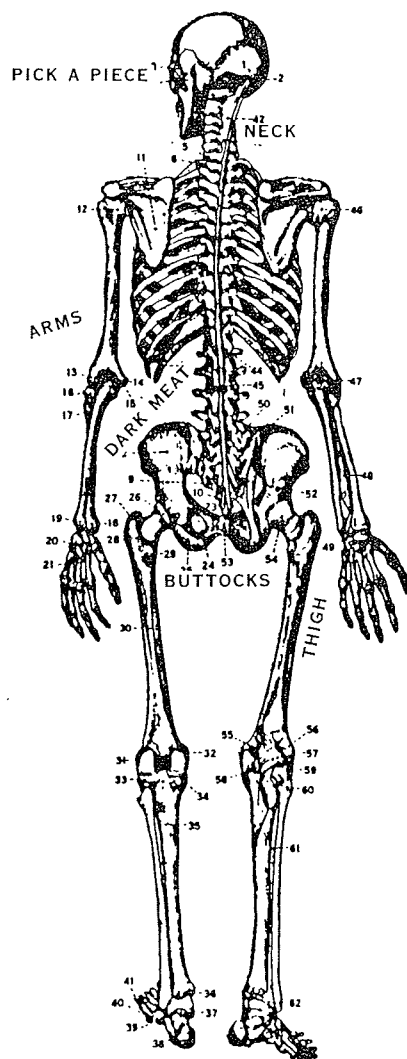
Cindy Tower was born on an Air Force base. In college she joined a sorority. Currently she is working in advertising to support her Art Habit.

Pennelope Goodfriend is an artist and photographer who lives in New York and travels frequently.

Kathy Gore-Fuss lives and works in Olympia, WA. Her work concerns human transformation through conflict, opposites, and absurdity.



THE POUND OF FLESH PROJECT BY ALIDA WALSH



HUMAN SKELETON
BACK VIEW

This project, of several distinct components, focuses around a powerful central object—a sculpture entitled *Pound of Flesh*. The *Pound of Flesh Project* includes the fabrication of the sculpture, its exhibition, a public feast, artists' performances, and a video production.

The sculpture itself is a ten-foot-high skeletal structure of welded meat hooks, resembling a Duchampian readymade. This structure forms the "bones" of the human figure. Slabs of raw meat articulate the figure and create an apparent musculature, reminiscent of Rembrandt's pieces of hanging meat or of Arcimboldo's painting of a butcher made of meat.

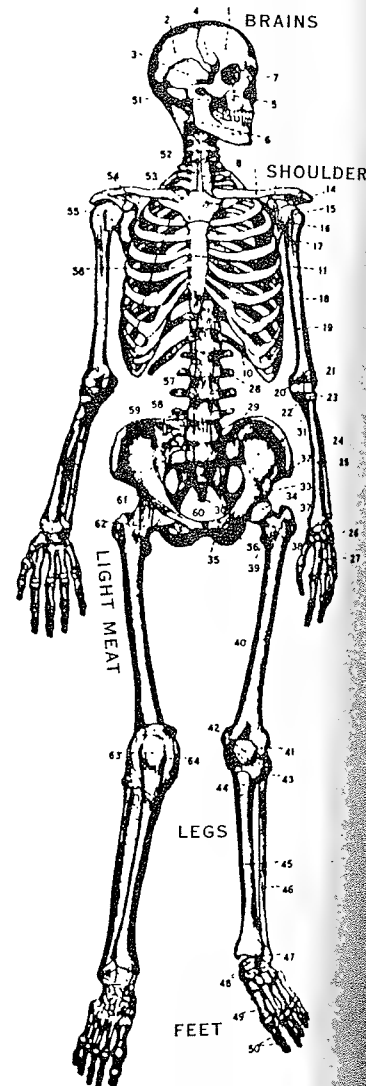
The fleshed-out sculpture will be encased in a 12'x4' transparent glass case, a refrigerated unit that will keep the meat frozen and edible.

Pound of Flesh will be exhibited in a gallery for one month. It will then be transported to Area, a club in Lower Manhattan, where an art event will culminate in the butchering, cooking, and serving of the meat at a public feast. Professional Benihana-type chefs will do the carving and slicing, and other performance artists will entertain the guests.

To help underwrite the project, a series of certificates will be designed and printed. Made available in a publicly advertised "stock" offering, these certificates will give contributors a "share" in the project and will give a record of the event.

Ms. Walsh will collaborate with other videomakers to produce a documentary for distribution and broadcast. This video production will address the same basic themes developed in the sculpture and art event—the issue of survival, the life/death cycle, what we have to give to get what we need. Associated themes include our connection to nature and to our own "flesh," the place of meat in contemporary society (safely locked in refrigerated cases in plastic packages), consumerism in the art world, and the ecologically efficient proposal—eat art!

Alida Walsh is a NYC artist who has been working on interdisciplinary projects and multimedia environments for 20 years. She is a video, film, and performance artist and is executive director of Women Artist Filmmakers.



HUMAN SKELETON
FRONT VIEW

THE GODDESS BAUBO



Sandra De Sando, Because of You, There's a Song in My Heart, 1986

The story of Baubo and me began out of a minor paranoia, an extra weight probably carried by all fat women. Always knowing you're different—Big—Bigger—Biggest. Out of bounds, out of control, over the limits—175 pounds, 200 pounds, 225 pounds, 250 pounds, 300 pounds, 375 pounds, more. Fat women are/are not fearful to measure up?

One day I was photographing Annie Goldson. We began modeling together, looking in the mirror to check the poses. I asked her, "How do you feel next to my body?" "Fine," she said. Did she feel lessened by my largeness, I needed to know? "Not at all," she replied.

(Fat women get used to tidy women's looks

of displeasure, many people's sneers and words of disgust—you EATWANTNEED too much.)

Buoyed by her answer, I photographed myself.

I decided that I would make drawings.

I put the negative in the projector.

I placed paper on the wall.

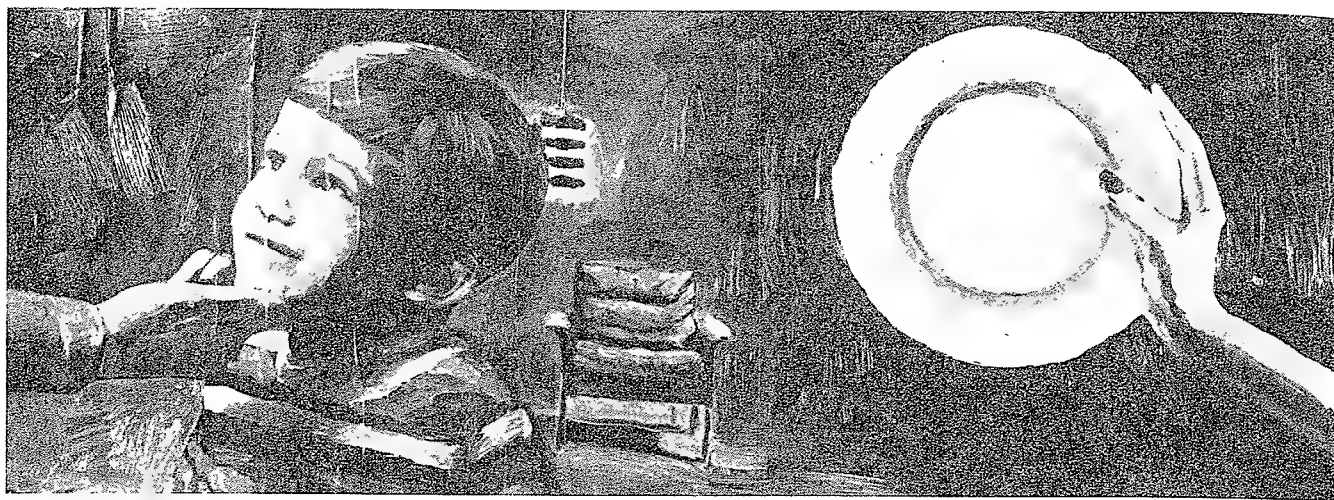
I turned on my projector.

My heart leaped!

The words, "Because of You, There's a Song in My Heart," rushed to my throat.

Soon after, I discovered Baubo, a fat, bawdy, sexy, trickster goddess. Many women carried around her likeness. It was she who taught women the mysteries.

—Sandra De Sando



Linda Leslie Brown, *Clean Plate Club*, oil on fabric on panel, 1986.

MARK DIAMOND

THE MENU FOR LOVE

by Joanne Giannino

I think I'm fat, I become anorexic

I'm fat. I don't know what I see. I know what I see. Don't try to tell me I'm not. My uncle says I look sick. But he doesn't like me fat does he? I fit into my stepmother's old clothes. I am her in adolescence before her first marriage, before pregnancy, before the bonds of traditional femininity imprison her; I live and refuse to be a woman; she dies a woman defined by her associations with men: wife, daughter, mother, mistress. I don't eat. I drink Kahlua at family gatherings. I'm ok in altered states. I don't have to deal with my family. Alcoholism is ok. Obesity is not.

I don't eat. I'm fat. There's a bulge between my hip bones. The ultimate is the little bones sticking out of my jeans. That's what I thanked the ladies at the health spa for, for fitting into my old jeans, for remaining a child, for being the best a woman can be, for having those little bones back.

When I stand it's great. It's hunger, feeling myself thin ... I love it. It's the only time I like my body. I don't eat. I'm in control. **Anorexics don't want to be women controlled by men**

I get up, eat half a grapefruit, I shower, I watch my protruding belly roll over itself. I'm fat. I look in the mirror; I see the bulge. I straighten my back and hold in my gut. "Hold in your stomach; it will learn to hold itself in." My aunt told me this. I was twelve years old. I have to eat. My stomach is growling. I feed it. I eat an omelet (two eggs), slice of cheese, coffee with no sugar. Four hundred calories a meal. Twelve hundred a

day. If I'm hungry, tough. I wait as long as I can, then I eat a granola bar, one hundred twelve calories. No supper. I go to the health spa every day. I do three times the exercises I'm supposed to do. If I can't go to the spa, I do exercises in the living room or in my mother's bedroom.

This needs an explanation: This is the room where my relationship with my mother blooms; it is here that we agree that I am fat, that my body must be controlled; this is what her father has told her through her mother; this is what my father has told me through her. This is the way I want you to be; this is the way you will be. **Men are created in the image of the creator and must see that all things are perfected in his image**

The room has a smokey mirror in it. When I look in the mirror I look smokey, like a movie star. I love looking in that mirror and so does my mother. I know she does. Why else would she have it there? My father bought it for her.

My mother thinks she can work in the world without conforming, but she must. She does leg lifts on her double bed. She eats as little as I do, no potatoes, no sugar, no ice cream, no fun. She cries because of men. She has to look good and work hard. I think she cries because of me, too, because I am like her; we're both fat and want to be loved. No men love fat ladies. She's five feet seven, weighs one hundred thirty five pounds. I'm five four, weigh one hundred fifteen pounds. We live by pounds and calories. Every morning we weigh ourselves. All day we count calo-

ries. We're smart. No problem. The health spa women say we don't need to lose weight, just tone and firm—abdomen, back behind the breasts, thighs, buttocks. We disagree. To be loved by men, the body must behave.

This is about control. When nothing else in the world can be controlled I can control my body. If I can control my body I will be admired and loved by men. I will be envied by women who want to be loved by men. I learn this by watching tv, looking in magazines, and watching my parents. I don't know that I'm falling into a trap. Not yet

I do one hundred sit-ups a day. If I don't do them, I watch the bulge in my stomach and feel sorry for myself. If I do the sit-ups, I feel great. The bulge will go away soon. I'm three steps in front of the other women.

This is about competition. To take off from one's body is to deny strength

The spa has a glass window in front, all covered in white. The carpet is pink, the walls pink, the lipstick that outlines the tree of women's names who have lost weight this month is pink. They've all won a dollar for each pound they've lost. My name is included, I've lost ten pounds: in cursive letters, in pink lipstick: our family tree. The lockers are pink, the nautilus machine, the bikes. The sweat tanks are pink and white. **All designed to get rid of unwanted loathsome female flesh, how unfortunate our gender!** We wear towels around our necks as we sweat. The

showers have those smokey glass doors; no one can see the bodies inside, only a silhouette and the pink stick-ons. Everyone is careful to dress in the pink dressing stalls. The sun room is also pink. We wear eye coverlets because the artificial-sun-in-a-fluorescent-tube may blind us.

Women are taught that their role in society is to please men, no matter what the cost or pain. We lie

The spa women all weigh ninety pounds and eat M&M's. They exercise eight hours a day and burn off the empty calories. They try to teach me to do the same. I do better, I lose fifteen pounds in one month because I eat better than they do. They balance themselves by eating candy and exercising. They stay the same. I lose because I know more than they do. **To maintain weight, one must burn off the calories one takes in. To lose weight, one must burn off more calories than one takes in. Both of these statements talk about calories, not nutrition. People who eat non-nutritive foods burn off their own muscle for necessary nutrients. These people are eating themselves. When women take off their own flesh, they agree to be controlled by men**

This is about constructing truth, not distinguishing. This is about distorted perception and current ideas about body size. This is about fashion. This is about teaching women to hate their bodies

I eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on pita bread. It takes twenty minutes. I watch the clock. I take a bite. I put down the sandwich and wait thirty seconds for the next bite. I do this every day at 10:30. That's when I eat lunch. I'm seventeen, in high school. If I'm hungry before lunch, I chew sugarless gum. Usually, four hundred calories is good for four hours. Twelve hundred calories:

twelve hours a day. This is how I figure it: 1 protein portion, 90; 1 vegetable portion, 45; 1 bread portion, 65; 1 skim milk portion, 90; 1 oil portion, 30; 1 fruit portion, 40; 400 total. **No exceptions, no deviations from the rules: 1,200 calories per day per female body**

I'm on a date. We're at the drive-in. I'm hungry. It's been hours since I've eaten. I hear the grumbings of my stomach. I feel them; I must eat. I pull out a granola bar. I always keep one in my purse, just in case, so I don't eat foolishly. I eat it slowly, and I offer a bite to my date. But, if I don't eat it all, I'll be hungry sooner than planned. Each piece has only so many calories. I divide the bar accordingly and calculate how long it will fill me: twenty-five calories per fifteen minutes or one hundred per hour or one calorie per minute in a sedentary position. At the food stand I buy him a chocolate chip cookie, 200 calories, and a soda, 175 calories. Empty calories; he won't be full for long. I drink coffee, black with no sugar. My stomach groans for relief. I can take it. I'm in control. I stay out till 2 a.m. I don't eat a thing.

This is about control, lying, denial, the pursuit of love. I don't want to be a woman

My friends at the nursing home where I work say I look great: my male friends, my female friends. I don't believe them. I never eat anymore. I count calories for old people, they would never count them. They're deviants; locked up away from society. I must have gained weight hanging out with them. They don't know the rules. I must have gained weight working here. That explains why I suddenly got fat. It happened here among all this food. Cake, cookies, jellies. Now I only eat the diabetic desserts, no calories. I can't gain weight. I can't be like my mother tied to home, dishes, laundry,

a husband, my father, domineering and arrogant. I can't be that woman. I won't be. No kids. I don't have my period. I'm safe. No belly, no fat, I don't eat. I get it off, all off. I won't eat like her either. Not "everything on my plate" to get "big and strong." Women don't get big and strong. They get big and pregnant and bossed around. I'll eat when I come home, late, when they're asleep. Cold rice or spaghetti from the fridge. Left overs, but not at the table, not in front of them. They can't make me. They won't see me. They'll never see. I won't become them. I won't. And no one will know.

This is about collusion. Anorexia is a family problem. The family is the mouth of our culture

In one month I have lost fifteen pounds. I fit into my old jeans. I write a letter of thanks to the spa for making this possible. They publish the letter in their testimonial book but don't include my picture. I am ugly. I wear glasses. My breasts are too small. My feet are too big. My ass is too small. I've reduced my body in record time. **Anorexics lose twenty-five percent of their body weight** There's a gully above my navel. All the fat old ladies ask me why I come to the spa. We sit in the sauna. I tell them I tone and firm. One woman eats a piece of cake for lunch. It has two hundred and fifty calories. She makes a trade. No lunch. We live by pounds and calories. Nutrition doesn't matter. It's calories that count and burning them off so we look like fifteen year olds. So we are loved by men: then we can get dressed with pride that we have no bulges, but until then, life is hell and every morning we must remind ourselves to eat slowly and not drink too much and sit straight and hold in our stomachs and exercise before work and after work, whenever we can get rid of that fat, that awful ugly us. ♦

MEDICAL COMPLICATIONS OF BULIMIA

☞ chronic esophagitis ☞ esophageal rupture ☞ gastric dilation ☞ gastric rupture ☞ electrolyte imbalance ☞ emetine cardiomyopathy ☞ chronic parotoid enlargement, 'moonface', glandular swelling ☞ volume dehydration ☞ irritable bowel syndrome or megacolon ☞ rectal prolapse ☞ diaphragmatic rupture with entrance of abdominal contents into chest cavity ☞ dental erosion ☞ chronic edema

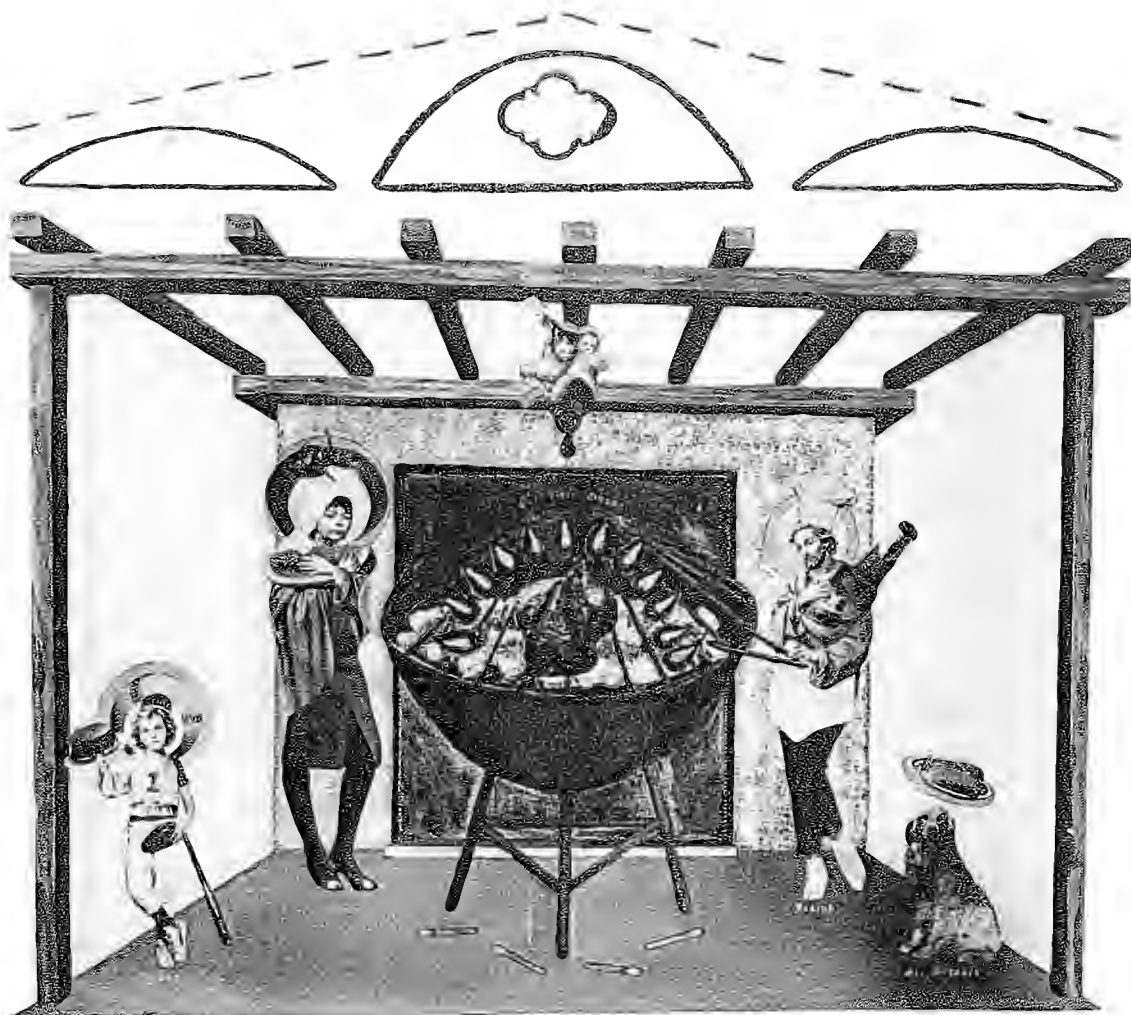
MEDICAL COMPLICATIONS OF ANOREXIA

☞ amenorrhea, arrest of menstrual cycle ☞ increased facial and body hair ☞ thin, dry scalp ☞ decreased scalp hair ☞ malnutrition ☞ sensitivity to cold ☞ diminished capacity to think ☞ weakness (electrolyte imbalance) ☞ lassitude cardiac arrest (death) ☞ joint pain (difficulty walking and sitting) ☞ sleep disturbance

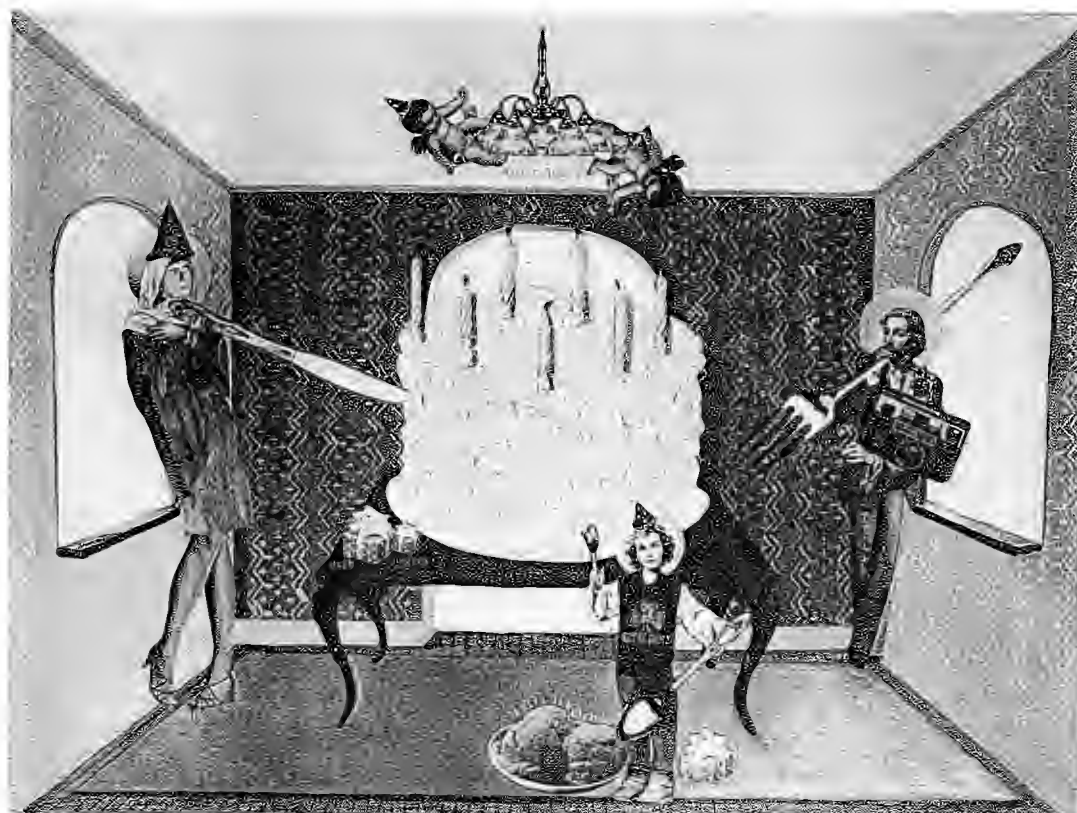
Joanne Giannino wrote *The Menu* while she was a student at the California Institute of the Arts and was learning to love her body. She is a mother and a writer, and lives in Brockton, MA.

Linda Leslie Brown became a member of the Clean Plate Club in 1954 in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is presently living and painting in Boston, where she teaches at the New England School of Art and Design.

Suzanne Siegel, *Holy Family Holidays: Perfect Bar-b-que*, mixed media with objects, 1985.



Suzanne Siegel, *Holy Family Holidays: Heavenly Birthday*, mixed media with objects, 1985.



Suzanne Siegel, *Our Lady of Constant Calorie Counting*, mixed media with photo self-portrait, 1982.



Pet

Peanut butter on a nipple
attracts my dog. She
strains arthritic legs to mount my bed,
sniffing at my breast,
licking, nudging my still side
in search of more. She
presses her nose against my skin.
A matter of hunger for her.

—Susan Stinson



the most ordinary moment

I found change and a raisin
in the sheets.

—Susan Stinson



Suzanne Siegel, *Our Lady of Heavenly Coffee*, mixed media with photo self-portrait, 1982.

Susan Stinson writes for the same reason she eats. Her work has appeared in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Common Lives*, *Yellow Silk*, and others. She lives in Boston.

The Oldest Accusation

by Nancy Sullivan

Notes on My Collage

Cannibalism is even juicier anthropological material than its cousin, witchcraft, because it is the inversion of humanity. The publication in 1979 of William Arens' book, *The Man-Eating Myth*, compelled anthropologists to review the data on anthropophagy. Arens concluded that the evidence wasn't there to prove the popular assumption that cannibalism has been a widespread practice among non-Western peoples. Man-eating does occur; we all have heard of the Donner party and starving prisoners of war. But these are instances of survival cannibalism and thus different from the vast body of headhunting and maneating tales that have come down to us from the time of early New World explorers up through yesterday's field notes. By and large, according to Arens, modern anthropologists have been repeating nasty rumors as matters of fact.

When faced with the sheer number of stories on cannibalism, both Arens' detractors and supporters must admit, with John Porter Poole of the University of California, San Diego, that "whether a given group of people does or does not do it, the holding of ideas about the phenomenon . . . may be almost universal." Nearly every group of people has been called cannibalistic at one time or another. The Romans accused the early Britons of it, and the Christians in their turn accused the Jews of sacrificing Christian babies for blood. (As late as 1909, one German scholar offered a chapter headed, "Is the Use of Christian Blood Required or Allowed for Any Rite Whatsoever of the Jewish Religion?") Europeans have called Africans cannibals, while Africans believed Europeans were practitioners of the deadly art. A tribe may accuse their neighbors of cannibalism but profess that they themselves have given it up (as a way of saying, writes Lyle Steadman, "how far they've come.") Even if Europeans may no longer stand accused of cannibalism, the *Human Relations File*, a scholarly compendium of cultural traits, still lists numerous non-Western peoples under the heading 'Cannibalism' (some, oddly, listed because they are assumed *not* to be cannibals).

Anthropology has come a long way since the time when Boas, Bateson, Mead, *et al.* first went into the field to study. Its data collection procedures have become so sophisticated that, in comparison, early records look like gossip columns. But evidence of cannibalism, strangely, still relies on hearsay and unreliable accounts.

Where the rumors leave off, a virtual industry of classification begins. Since Claude Levi-Strauss compiled the first cookbook of

symbolic possibilities for the act (kin should be boiled, enemies roasted, etc.), decades of distillation have yielded some working categories: endo-cannibalism, eating members of one's own group; exo-cannibalism, consuming outsiders; and auto-cannibalism, munching on one's self (?). To determine the motives involved in the act calls for such terminology as: gastronomic cannibalism, or, just for the taste of it; ritual cannibalism, transubstantiation of certain body parts for their powers; and survival cannibalism, indulging out of necessity.

We also can now consult a source taking an ecological approach, which gives us calorie counts and nutritional values, and which can be judged by such unforgettable pearls as: "Data from different New Guinea societies indicate that the balance between protein-inputs varies with such things as ecological zonation and the structure of the local ecosystems involving human populations." From the scantiest of first-hand accounts, the structuralists, ecologists, and popularizers alike arrive at some basic premises: that cannibalism not only exists but was once more pervasive; and that the subjects of their energetic study are the 'primitives,' the 'natives' and the 'aboriginals.'

The debate over the fact or fiction of cannibalism has been revitalized by the recent discoveries of paleoanthropologists Raymond Dart in East Africa and Paolo Villa in France. They have found bones that seem to show that our ancestors were the original partakers of human flesh. Villa's find—6000-year-old bones that seem to have been gnawed and scraped for food just like any other animals—could show that ancient man viewed outsiders as mere subhuman dinner meat. Said one member of the team, "It is the ultimate sort of 'us' and 'them.'"

'Us' and 'them' pervade every aspect of the cannibalism debate. Most of the original accounts of anthropophagy are filled with the heathen 'them' of the New World; the modern material is also filled with informants' accounts of how 'them' yonder are maneaters. The scholarly observers are divided into two camps. One camp shoulders charges of ethnocentricity aside; they maintain we should weigh the pervasiveness of cannibal accounts and the extreme variability of human culture and therefore conclude that cannibalism is more than rumor and less than an insult—it's a matter of fact. The second camp persists in sniffing out the nature of the Other's otherness. But even Arens, who convincingly revealed the slanderous intent of most of the maneating material, neglects those most likely

to be slandered. In *The Man-Eating Myth*, he does briefly explore how, as often as Westerners accuse the 'natives' of cannibalism, the natives in turn accuse their women. There she is at last: the ultimate Other.

Throughout the literature this pattern is repeated, beginning with the sixteenth-century German seaman, Hans Staden, who said that the 'maneating' Tupinamba women of South America 'make a joyful cry' during the act. No doubt woman's usual role as meat-handler and cook makes the accusation palpable to the male informants and the male anthropologists alike—the mystery of the kitchen, and all that. It may be only because the men and women of a tribe are generalized as 'the tribe' that we don't find 'Primitive Women' under the heading 'Cannibals' in the *Human Relations File*.

Most of the thousands of maneating stories have come to us from male informants reporting to male anthropologists. Only recently have women begun to double-back on the territory and base their studies on female informants. Elizabeth Faithorn, for one, has been studying pollution (ritual uncleanness) in an area notorious for female cannibals, New Guinea. Among the Mae Enga of Papua's western highlands, women are considered so dangerous that contact with menstrual blood may cause a man's slow decline and death. This fear is echoed in St. Augustine's contention that menstruating women should not be allowed inside churches. We're familiar with the prejudices of our own Western past; St. Augustine again, writing circa 400 A.D., mirrors the belief in the 'primitiveness' of woman: "Childbearing women do often long for evil things, as coals and ashes. I saw one long for a bite of a young man's neck, and has lost her birth that she bit off his neck until he was almost dead, she took such a hold." Today we may have dismissed stories about cannibalism among the Picts, Irish, and Scots, but New Guinea's cannibal women still spark our imaginations.

If you visit the sumptuous Michael Rockefeller wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, you can see a beautiful headdress, isolated on a pedestal, that comes from a Nimangki Men's Society in the New Hebrides Islands. It depicts a woman's head, that of the mythical cannibal ancestor Nevinbumbaan. Her husband rides like a small doll on her shoulders. Throughout this region there are legends of female cannibal ancestors. These legends are more 'real' to these people than the West's own tale of Kronos eating his children is to us; they listen to the tales to see how they have evolved from

the culturally and biologically primitive life of the cannibal. Everyone wants to say, "Look how far we've come," especially since new finds of gnawed human bones suggest that *all* of us were once cannibals. In his defense of self image, the noble savage in the field is quick to point the finger at his wife. Astonishingly (or not) for men who scorn rumor-mongering and cultural biases, our field observers love to take the men's words down.

In 1976 Dr. D. C. Gajdusek won a Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine for his conclusions that the dreaded neurological disease of kuru had been transmitted by the Fore women of New Guinea during secret acts of cannibalism. At the time, some researchers thought a sounder theory was that the disease, which can be transmitted only through direct contact with a victim's brain, passed to the women during funerary rites, when women handled and embalmed the corpse. But I suspect Dr. Gajdusek is a terrific fan of horror films; he chose the more dramatic thesis and came up a winner.

I have this cheap paperback with a jacket that asks, "Was there a Countess Dracula?" I don't know, but it sounds like a more appropriate legend; women, as we've seen, should make the best cannibals. Isn't a vampiressa better than a vampire any day (or night)? Along the same lines, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* gives us more than anything *Motel Hell* or *Texas Chainsaw Massacre II* can offer when we see a young girl zombie begin to devour her own mother. In pop horror products, women often dwell in that pre-cultural realm of Freud's in which nothing, not anything, is taboo. Books and movies keep churning out these psycho-sexual fantasies so that by now women maneaters are a pretty familiar theme. And those anthropologists who rely on the sheer

number of stories of broken taboos to say that taboos are indeed broken—they may end up accusing ordinary modern women of maneating based on these pop-horror products. Their evidence will consist of psycho-sexual fantasies fueled by men's fear of women's 'primitiveness,' their closeness to nature with a capital N. Modern women are pretty dangerous, too, it seems. ■

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Nancy Sullivan is a painter and sculptor of issue-oriented work. Her works frequently combine art-historical and archaeological elements to make their point.



South American women roasting a human

WOMAN EATS MAN

SUNDAY DINNER

for you
I hope my daddy ain't cold tonight
walkin' the streets
with nothing to eat
While I'm here eatin'
turkey and sweet potatoes
and Crystall's home baked cornbread

THE BAD TIT

I never got much to eat
when I was comin' up
Momma gave me sugar water
till checkday came
When she died
daddy's new wife
cut the bacon in half
before I ate it
When the veal got passed around
at dinner
I got a thin piece
between ends of bread
and a glass of cherry koolaide

I can't ignore all of this
for a baby suckin'
at her momma's breast
be satisfied
should

POEMS BY AISHA ESHE



Sylvia de Swaan, b&w photograph.

SUNDAY DINNER

Everytime I cut up chicken
I think of grandmom
when she usta say
"Jus' gimme the las' part
that goes over the fence"

Everytime I cut up chicken
I feel sorry
when I cut off the tail end
but grandmom ain't here
to eat it no more.

STARVED

I don't have to drink
sugar anymore
and I give my stale bread
to the birds

I've come beyond
my hunger years
in time spent feeding others
in fear of my foodless years



Aishe Eshe's poetry is published throughout the country. She is a Master's Candidate at Iowa State University and is the mother of four children.

Sylvia de Swaan is a photographer born in Rumania. She currently lives in Utica, NY, where she is the Director of Sculpture Space.

A MEAL

"He looks like my daddy"
I think
As I watch him eat the peas and rice
"Excuse the cracked plate"
I say to him
"This sure is good"
He says
ignoring what I said about the plate
"I wasn't sure what you like to eat"
I make another attempt
This time he answers
"I understand
we haven't known each other long
but the food you serve
reminds me of home
Of my mother
Of Africa
Remember I told you
your mother's picture
reminded me of my mother
Well now it's the food
That's a lot to take"
I wanted to tell him
that my daddy is tall like him
and darker than me like him
The good lookin' face
The smile
Maybe even the voice
If I can remember Daddy's voice
spoken 20 years ago
but he did say
"That's a lot to take"
So I smiled
and reminded him to drink his tea
before it got cold

TIME STOPPED

He's tall
Looks strong
like daddy usta look

His face is easy to look at
I glance into the pierce of his dark eyes

It's Sunday at my dinner table
We eat Crystall's African Stew

She sits proud
in her child's seat
I watch them and wonder what's next

DONT TOUCH IT'S *hot*

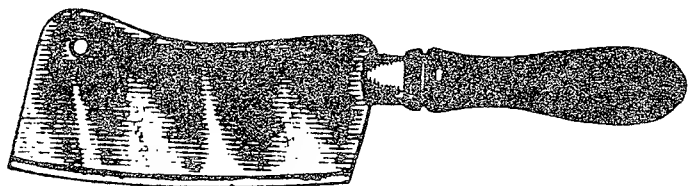
by Carol Dorf

She puts a pot on the table. Macaroni casserole. I am so hungry. He is not at home.

As a child she wouldn't eat. They sent her to the Children's Seashore Home to flesh out her bones. Fall to winter. That decided her never to forcefeed her own children.



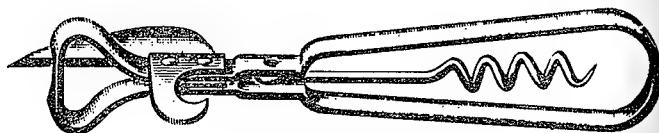
If we don't eat she says we'll have to eat it the next day and the next until it is gone. She never hits for not eating.



He says he will stuff it down our throats. When he found the rough meat I hid under the napkin, he said he'd teach me a lesson I'd never forget. She smiled a little smile from her nerves. I fell down and she said, stop, stop it, to him.

Casserole, a new oven-to-table baking dish. We agree with her how pretty. I am hungry this day. He isn't home. Outside kids play in the courtyard. She takes something out of the cabinet. Then sits down.

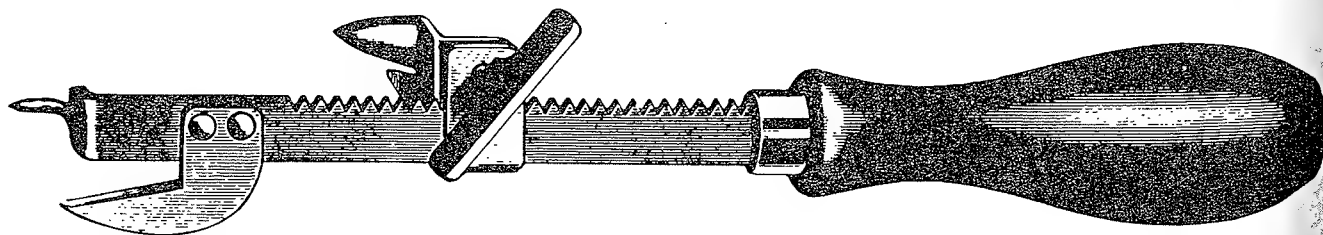
I reach to pull over the casserole. It is so hot. My hand sticks. The skin pulls away as I jerk back. She puts ice on it.



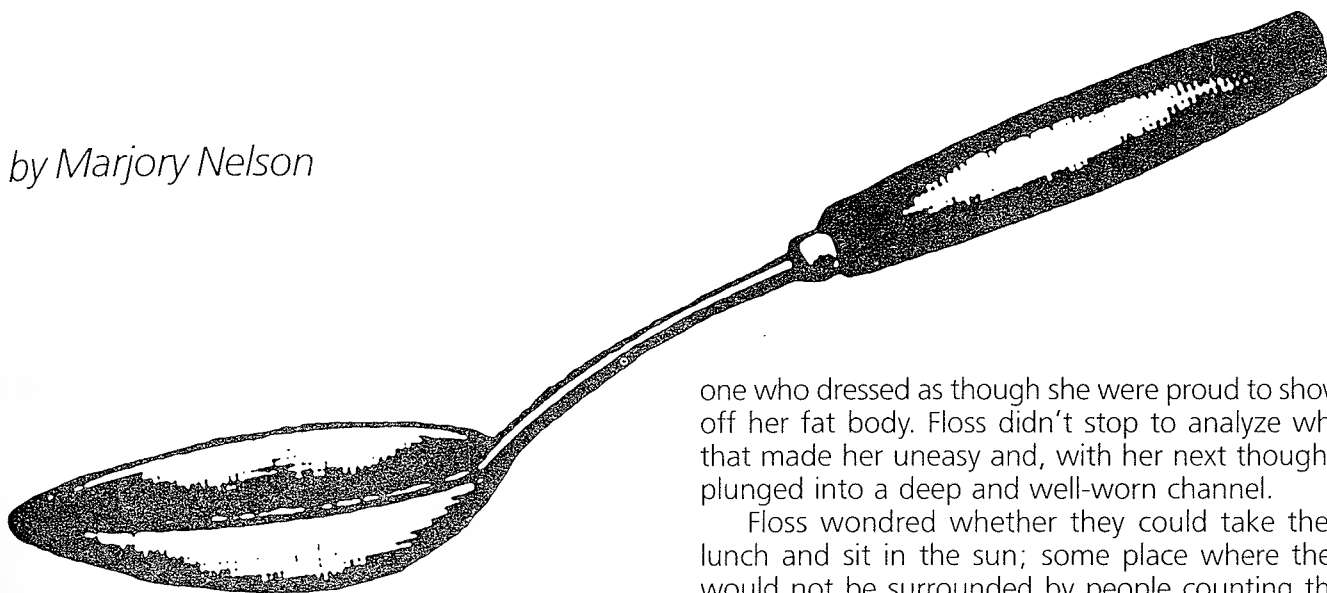
When he burns me, he puts butter on it afterwards to make it better.

Not hungry anymore. That night before bedtime he feeds me ice cream.

Carol Dorf lives in California and has had many poems published. She's general manager of the San Jose Poetry Center and has a book forthcoming from e.g. press.



by Marjory Nelson



The morning after the meeting, Floss felt so happy she was singing and dancing around her apartment before eight o'clock in the morning. She opened her back window and talked to the birds sitting in her bottle brush tree. She even remembered to water her spider plant and her Swedish ivy. In ecstasy, she relived all the events of the previous evening, savoring each precious detail of her conversation with Bert.

Bert and Floss had made a date to meet at one o'clock and then go out for lunch together. Bert worked in a bakery down on Church Street, only five or six blocks from the variety store where Floss worked. She told Floss that she'd meet her at the store and then they could decide where they wanted to go to eat. It had all seemed simple and reasonable when the women had parted the previous evening.

All morning, Floss could think of little else but the meeting, and she was hoping to continue the magic she and Bert had spun together. Bert had brought her so much clarity and understanding. So when Floss entertained the simple questions about where to go for lunch, she did so out of the desire to extend her newly discovered moments of pleasure.

Yet before she realized what had happened, Floss was wondering whether she wanted to be seen in public eating with another fat woman, especially

Marjory Nelson is a lesbian writer, hypnotherapist, and fat activist in San Francisco. This is an excerpt from her novel in process, *Dora's Aura*.

one who dressed as though she were proud to show off her fat body. Floss didn't stop to analyze why that made her uneasy and, with her next thought, plunged into a deep and well-worn channel.

Floss wondered whether they could take their lunch and sit in the sun; some place where they would not be surrounded by people counting the calories in every bite they put into their mouths. She speculated over what foods it would feel safe to order and how much it would feel safe to eat. She knew that, even though she might end up eating less than any of the thin women around, everyone present would swear that these two fat women consumed twice as much as anyone else in the restaurant.

But what Floss didn't know and what gave her great anxiety, was whether in fact Bert might eat ravenously, thus justifying all the criticism and comments Floss feared. What if Bert sat at the table with her flesh hanging out for everyone to see and had the audacity to enjoy herself as she ate?

It was too much to consider. Floss spun into a panic. What could she do? Accepting a common belief that fat women do not deserve to enjoy their food, Floss had learned a habit of ordering small meals in public and eating quickly to get the whole meal over with as painlessly as possible. Although she did love good food, it had been years since she had known the pleasure of eating her fill in a restaurant, or any public place. She went out to eat with her friends because she enjoyed the social contact, not the meals.

It was one thing to sit in a meeting with other fat women and talk about all the changes she wanted to see in the acceptance of fat women's rights, and quite another matter entirely to start behaving in public as though she already believed that she deserved these rights.

As Floss turned this problem over in her mind, it



MONSTERS



was an easy jump to the question of whether Floss was in fact ready to start eating anything she wanted. She wasn't sure that she deserved to have any food at all. Even though at the group meeting she had said she wasn't going to diet any more, did this mean that she was going to stay this fat for the rest of her life?

When she dieted, Floss could hold the illusion that at some future time she would be thin. Even though she knew that her dieting had never been successful for more than a few months at a time, as long as she was dieting she felt herself to be acceptable. She could show the world a diet plate and tell people about her latest efforts.

While Floss was dieting, she never had to confront the fat woman who lived in her body, the woman with the great passions, the women of large ideas. As long as she dieted, she could pretend to be a thin woman, an acceptable woman who measured her life out in small portions. Her fifty-eight previous diets were a powerful tribute to the tenacity of this illusion.

If Floss stopped dieting, she would be forced to live without this protective screen, to accept herself as she was: a woman of great magnitude. A fat woman. Could she do this? She wasn't sure.

Suddenly, it became very clear to Floss that she was too fat even to think about being acceptable. She had no right to be in a public place eating, or even taking up space. She felt out of control of herself and her life. How could such a person ever presume to talk about her rights? It was the meeting and all the brave things that were said there that were the big illusion.



All morning, these thoughts roared through Floss's mind, spinning her round and round, deeper and deeper into self-deprecation and despair. By the time one o'clock rolled around, Floss was a wreck. She wanted to back out of the date with Bert entirely. She was so upset, she could not speak the words that needed to be said. Instead she was gruff and aloof.

Bert wasn't surprised at the change in her new friend. Bert had been through it all plenty of times herself. She told Floss very firmly that she was going to have to take control of these issues.

"Floss, you're a big strong woman, you must vanquish that monster again and again until it no longer has the strength to return."

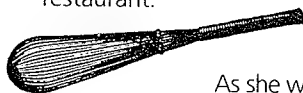
"Why don't we pick up some sandwiches at the deli and take them over to Dolores Park? It's a beautiful day. I'd love to be outside."

"I hate eating sandwiches on my lap. I want a table in front of me. We can go to the park after lunch if there's still time." Bert suggested one of the good restaurants on 24th Street where they could enjoy well-cooked food at their leisure.

"No, let's just go to the cafe. It's easier there."

"What the hell is EVER easy? I want to treat you to a really good meal. I'll bet you never treat yourself."

Floss's sheepish grin said "You're right and you win." The women left the store and walked the short block to the corner of Noe Street, where a royal blue awning advertised the restaurant.



As she walked through the door, Floss checked out the seating arrangements. Small tables were crowded one upon another. She looked at Bert pleading, "Let's get out of here." But Bert forged ahead, requesting the waiter to find a comfortable place for them. She turned to Floss to explain. "The room isn't crowded. That is a reasonable thing to ask."

And it was done. The waiter found a table along the window and pulled the surrounding tables back a few inches, giving them ample room. Bert thanked him and winked at Floss as she sat down.

Bert was wearing a bright blue dashiki printed with a geometric design, blue corduroy pants and a dark blue cap.

Hmm, she looks terrific, Floss thought, and asked, "Do you always wear a hat?"

"Only when I'm not sleeping."

The waiter brought menus, water, and a basket of bread and butter. Bert dove in. "You'd think I'd get enough of this stuff at the bakery, but I never eat there, so I'm starving." She pulled a piece of bread off the loaf and buttered it. "Besides, we don't make this sourdough at our bakery. Just sweet stuff."

Floss watched fascinated while Bert devoured her bread and then reached for another slice. Shoving the basket toward Floss, she said, "Don't you want any? It's wonderful and hot." The pungent aroma of meat roasting on charcoal added to the yeasty scent of the bread, filling the room. Floss felt her mouth grow juicy, while her stomach rumbled. She tried not to smack her lips.

"No, thanks, I'm not very hungry." Floss lied. She had already decided that Bert could eat her share of the bread so they wouldn't have to ask for more.

"Well, what do you want to eat? I'm starving." Bert was grinning, obviously enjoying herself immensely. "Pick out whatever you want. This one's on me." She rolled her tongue around inside one cheek and picked up the elaborately calligraphied sheet of paper that described the day's specials.

Floss looked at her menu and decided on a bowl of Greek lemon soup, agleomeno. That would be fine, but she knew then and there that what she wanted more than anything else in the world was some of that sourdough bread, thick and warm, to dip into the hot soup. She took a surreptitious look at the bread basket to see if there really was enough for both of them just as Bert looked up from her menu.

"C'mon Floss, have some bread." She pushed the basket toward Floss. "It's delicious. C'mon, enjoy yourself. When the waiter comes, I'll ask for more."

Hesitantly, Floss reached into the basket and tore off a slice. There was still another piece left, and several squares of butter. "This'll be enough for me, I'm sure," she said, hoping that it would be enough for Bert, too.

It wasn't. When the waiter returned, Bert immediately requested a refill of the basket and more water. Floss ordered the soup.

"Don't you want more than that?" Bert chided her. "How can you work all day and not eat more?" Bert ordered the soup, a large salad and a serving of spanikopeta. "Try some of that, Floss, you'll love it."

"No, this is really all I want," Floss maintained. She was fiddling with her fork, tracing patterns on the blue checkered tablecloth, trying to figure out what she was doing. She had sat in restaurants before, but this feeling was something new. When she ate out with Janet or Shirley she might feel self-conscious, but somehow, because she was with them, eating in public felt possible; only barely so, but manageable.

This was definitely different. As she sat in her chair by the window and looked across at Bert, Floss felt a moment of panic that she was not going to get through this. Not in the same old way.

Floss might only order soup and skimp on bread, but Bert would still have a fine time eating what she wanted. No matter what she did, and regardless of whether she took any pleasure for herself, Floss felt guilty by association with this fat woman

who was joyously satisfying her own needs. Floss felt like her skin was peeling off, leaving nothing underneath but her fat, exposed and unprotected.



At her home the previous evening, Floss had been able to see Bert as another woman like herself, different in some ways, and with great information to share. Up to this point, their friendship had been amazingly easy. But out in public was another matter, for now there was no ignoring the substance of either of them. With Bert, Floss saw herself through the eyes of the waiter, the other patrons in the restaurant, even the pedestrians on the sidewalk who stopped to look in the window.

Floss took a drink of water and all of her self-hatred boiled up into her throat, gagging her, choking her. As she spluttered and coughed, the waiter came over to see if he could help. Floss felt eyes on her and wanted to die.

Something was happening here, and there was not one thing Floss could do to stop it, nor any place to run. She took deep breaths and tried to get herself under control. As her coughing subsided, Floss looked helplessly across the table.

Bert saw the question in her face that lay unspoken in a pool of words in the bottom of her eyes: How can you live and be so fat?

"Are you okay?" When Floss nodded yes, Bert asked, "How are you feeling today about the meeting last night?"

"There's so much new stuff that I'm going round and round in circles trying to figure out what's right for me. You know, Bert, I just can't imagine saying that I'm not going to diet any more."

"It seems unamerican?"

Floss chuckled, "I guess it does. Only worse."

"The important thing is to start loving yourself. You don't have to put yourself down all the time just because you're fat. Do you believe that?"

"Not really. I want to, but it's so damned difficult. I hear you talking, I listen to your words, and they're magnificent. But then I walk down the street and every shop window I pass tells me how ugly I am, what a failure."

"That's your judgements, Floss. That's what you have to change. The time has come for you to make a decision. Stop this eternal deprivation, this constant vigilante action you force on yourself. Be free. Be a fat woman—a healthy, happy fat woman."

Elizabeth Layton began drawing in 1977 at the age of 68. Drawing pictures of herself to express personal and social concerns, she has had exhibitions in nearly 100 cities across the country.



Elizabeth Layton, *Grandma's Thanksgiving*.

"I know you said that last night, but I'm having a terrible time believing that you're right."

"You have NOTHING to lose," Bert said. "Why not find out for yourself whether or not dieting can help you? Better yet, make a decision to take good care of your body and see where that leads you."

Freedom sat across the table from Floss wearing a blue cap and smiling. Floss didn't know how to respond. She felt something springing loose all over her body, but since she didn't recognize the feeling, she did not know that it was her soul stretching for space.

Floss knew what she was doing when the words formed, and some urge to hurt Bert let them slip out. "Well, that's easy for you to say."

The words hit their mark. Bert sat up and pulled her hat down over her brow. "What does that mean, Floss? Do you think that I was born understanding about fat oppression? When I told you that I stopped dieting three years ago, didn't it occur to you to think about what that was like? Do you think it was easy?"

Floss looked at Bert's angry face and thought; It isn't you I challenge, it's myself, my life that faces me in you. Softly, she asked, "How did you learn? How did you change?"

Bert's face relaxed into a big grin. "I thought you'd never ask. I started talking to another fat woman about what we'd really been doing to ourselves."

"You mean you were just like me?"

"I still am, Floss."

The food arrived. Bert looked at Floss's single bowl and asked kindly, "Want to change your mind and order something else?"

"No, thanks, this soup will be enough." Floss was drooling over the spinach pie with steam rising out of its

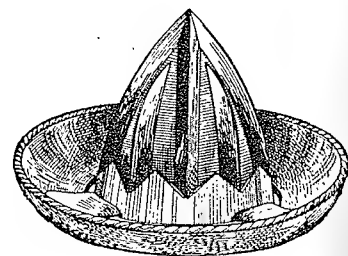
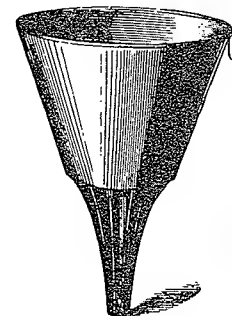
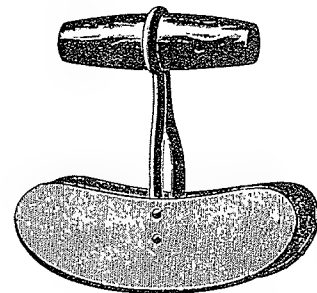
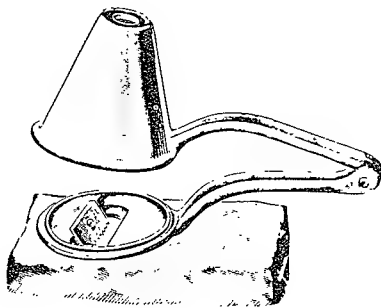
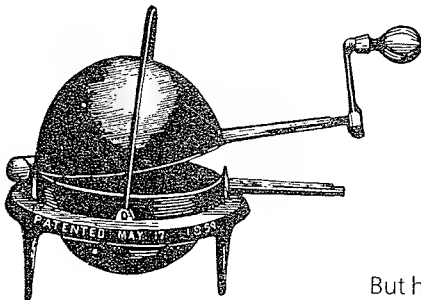
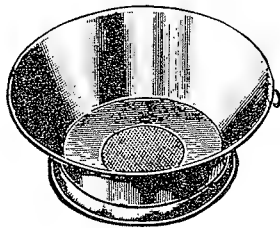
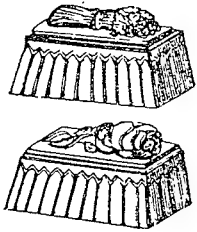
delicate brown crust. Like a hungry dog, Floss watched every bite that Bert took.



By the time Floss climbed the hill to her home that night, she was hungry and discouraged, too. She wanted to believe Bert, but wasn't sure that she dared. Although she meant well, Bert's pushing still made Floss feel defensive. The more she was exhorted to change her self-deprecating ways, the more Floss felt like a failure. She did not know how to latch on to Bert's words and use them for herself.

Floss realized that she would have to find a way herself. But with a shock of recognition, Floss knew at last that she wanted to try. ■

IN THE KITCHEN by Helane Levine-Keating



The wife is in the kitchen
with her vegetables. She
is paring them one by one,
chopping them into little squares
to be crushed in the mouth,
small green cubes simmering hotter
and greener. Her meat's in the oven,
succulent, growing tender,
skin tanning to a perfect shade.
Her timer's on: she always knows
when to stir her food, how
to make her meat and vegetables come
together at exactly the right moment:
the juicy, bubbling climax of deliciousness.

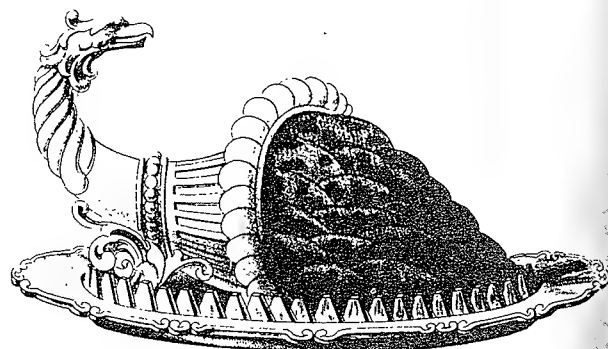
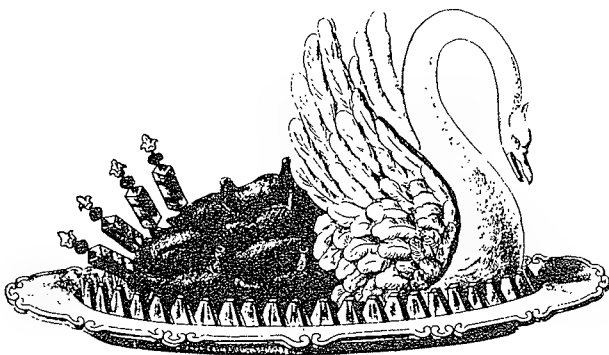
One minutes to go —countdown.
She unwraps the peasant loaf
with its hard thick crust,
the yellow butter smooth as her stomach.
Ice crystals pop in fluted water glasses.
the timer rings.

She makes ready to serve,
but what's this? Like clockwork,
her husband enters the kitchen.

Eyes soft and hazy, arms
roping her in, he pins her
to the dishwasher. Her scents
turn him on. Once again she's
queen of all that's nourishing.

But her thoughts are elsewhere:
an apron divides them, whets
his appetite all the more—
this husband who wants her most
while she's spooning string beans.
"Dinner's ready!" she snaps,
her arms breaking his loving grasp,
hands pushing him out
to the table, to her meal.
Annoyance smolders,
the burnt remains of countless
other dinners cooked to perfection
in centuries of women's kitchens.

Helane Levine-Keating's poetry has appeared in many
literary magazines. She is an assistant professor of
English at Pace University in NYC.



Excerpts from an evolving collaborative theater piece by Kim Hone and Joanie Fritz, *Soup*, developed in cooperation with the Protean Forms Collective and Cynthia Frantz, Claire Picher, and Lex Zawaski.

Soph's Despair Over Too Much Spice

I had a weekend of it and I have had enough now
I am not obliged to be giving 24 hours a day
He came and gave me the missing item to flavor the soup
I told him it tasted fine, he moved in and out
He had to brag about it, pour in more and more spice
Now it tastes like salt on a wound
The delicate aroma of my kitchen is overrun with his scent
and I am running back and forth between serving, stirring, sighing,
He has his ideas and his wandery ways
I have my cauldron and my flock to tend
I want clean floors, no bathtub rings
Silence and space, the comfort of my own body
I do not have to applaud him for cleaning himself
I do not need to be instructed when to come
Or go, or sleep, or sing
I do not want everything explained to me
I already understand, and I am sad
that the recipe always works.

Joanie Fritz

5 people, 7 people, or 12 or more Balmy night feels like spring in fall or vice versa. Coming together. For soup. Throwing the key out the window each time, an accepted and cryptic greeting. Men and women (still no androgynes). Soup, the beginning, thin, isolated vegetables, flaky herbs.

Relaxing, talking, laughing, arguing. The stars are all out behind the smog. The idea that something is there even though one can't see it. The streets are unusually quiet. Someone puts on music, African, pygmy polyphonics. Imagine singing with our neighbors every day. It is there if we just could see it. Waiting for soup. It's there too, but not quite ready.

The women and men continue to relax, talk, laugh, and argue. We continue to wait. The soup continues. The night is balmy like spring in fall. The street is unusually quiet. The key has passed through the window 13 times. There are 4 distinct circles of conversation, there are 2 by the water (kitchen sink), there is one alone. The stars are all out behind the smog. They are all there, we can't see them.

We eat soup together, laugh, relax, argue, talk. It is fall, we are here, together, a clamor arises from the street and fades. Evening preserved through the delicate balance of soup, laughter, men, women, key, water, two, one, etc.

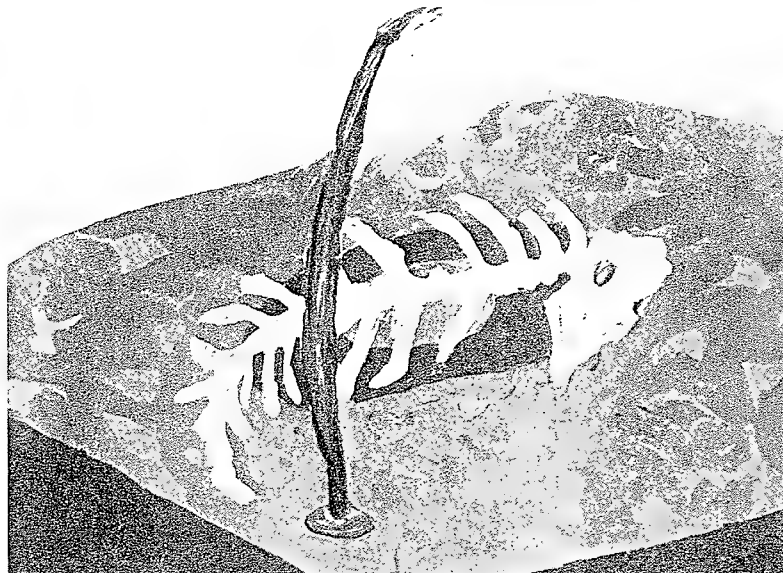
Joanie Fritz is an actor and activist living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She is cofounder of Protean Forms Collective. Kim Hone collaborated with Ms. Fritz on the broad outlines of "Soup." She is an actor/dancer/choreographer living in NYC and would like the piece to be a community dance and a ritual feed. And a play.

Mas Sopa

Kim Hone



Kim Anno, *Soup Spill*, acrylic.



Kim Anno, *Pteroptus*, acrylic.

Kim Anno is currently teaching at Napa Valley College. In 1986, she received a grant from the Oakland Arts Council for community projects.



Carrie Cooperider



Big women git ignored
or stared at
or people look away and try not to see
big women get more than their share of
disdain, ridicule
the bigger you are
the less you're seen
they cant take their eyes off the rolls of flesh
the lumps, hanging belly
the fat compells tears out their eyes
but you remain invisible
fat and ugly become synonymous
you can be ugly without being fat
but you cant be fat without being ugly
and in the land of the beautiful
to be ugly is to be unseen
like being differently formed, no one can take their eyes off
the missing or different limb, in this case the, to their mind,
excess flesh
admission of greasy lip nites, secret masturbatory glory
swathed in chocolate, grits, fried things and cream puffs that
turn to ripples on your thighs, hard lumps on your hips,
mountains of flesh out of control out of control
seeping over elastic waistbands, spilling from underneath bras
forming hills that sit on thighs sweet sweet looking for
something to eat, round defiance, corpulent rebellion
in the land of Farrah Fawcett and Jackie O so slim so rich
so wite
in the land of the free and the slave
in the land of the never too thin never too rich
to be big is to be invisible
the wider the you, the narrower the view

SOME THINGS ABOUT

THE POLITICS OF SIZE

2

When you are big cute cloze dont fit
you wear big blouses from India
little boys will call you fatso
a total stranger walked past me and said smoothly
chilling me, "You're getting fatter." The reason blunted
the assault sharp.

You can be exercising your human right to eat a donut
when and where you choose, such as walking down the street
and at the same time choose not to respond to some
teenagers, "Bey Baby," as you eat and be told, "That's why you fat!"
No thot, compunction—you are the butt of insult, you are a joke
fat joke fat joke fat joke laff laff till you cry vomit laff laff
at your big ass your funny rotund gigantic ass everyone knows
you eat too much weight weight better get that weight off if
you wanna dance act sing. Sing? What singing got to do with
fat?

Ask Florence Ballard and Dinah Washington.

Drop drop the pounds the pills till your mouth dry up and your brain
burns a marathon in circles dry you up wasted your mind nerves
gain back more than you ever lost fast fast at last 14 day fast enema
colonic fast plastic pants sweat sweat the fat is still there
it is the last to go sweat sweat water heart tissue, muscle tissue,
brain tissue go first, too weak now to wear the pretty dress or
running shorts, too tired to show off the cellulite free legs
Ahh some green and orange dexadrine left at the bottom of the
tiny amber vial, now we feel good like a cigarette should puff
puff ANYTHING rather than eat, leave your money at home
dont bring it you might buy something to eat
oh god oh god I'm gonna kill myself i cant stand it ugh!
i hate looking in the mirror
if i wasnt so fat i'd be—i'd do—i could—if i wasnt so fat
i would—as soon as i lose weight i'm gonna ...

3

There was a lady who got so fat that when she got sick
and had to go to the hospital they had to get the fire department
to knock the walls of her house out cause she couldnt fit out the door.
I read that in *Jet Magazine*. How did she get to the bathroom— take a
bath, piss, shit? The light of day? How long had she gone without a walk
to the store, church? How did she live? Even welfare demands a
face to face every three months. Did she have a husband, lover?
500 lbs. That's deep. They had a picture of them bringing her out.
It took a lot of them. She looked blurred, a dark mountain with short
pressed hair sticking up.
(now for some reason sitting here retyping this I think of the goddess.)

BY SAPPHIRE

4

Dexatrim, Metracal, Pepsi Light, Diet Pepsi, Diet 7UP, No Cal, Lo Cal devoid of sugar fulla chemicals saccharin, cyclamates, dexadrine, dexamil, benzadrine, take a pill.

5

Fat people dont suffer. The lithe and pale pine away. Surrounded by flesh equals insensitive. Yes, of course, if you were sensitive you wouldn't be fat. But anyway, the maiden by the sea has long brown hair, anemic skin, her eyes are deep dark burning wells with smokey circles underneath, the anguish of unrequited love eats away at her, her skin stretches over protruding cheek bones.

The maid the maid she sleeps on old sheets under a worn coverlet. Suet, blood porridge, her cheeks as apples, rolls around her waist like large wite donuts *dull* insentient creature that has never known upper class heart rendering appetite killing love.

The slave the slave she is lacing Scarlett O'Hara into her stays. Little southern sylph. Fat black elephant. Ponderous lump of lard devoid of any emotion except worry, worry over her everloving in love PASSIONATE winsome, long haired, thin mistress, "Oh Missy! You gonna kill yourself, you got me worried near bout to death! You ain et, you ain slept, come on wont you please eat a little somethin for Mammy!"

Where her thighs meet are sore now, the flesh rubbing together has chafed the skin. The bright wite shoulder straps of the 48EEE bra cut deep into her flesh, the whalebone is a constant hurt girdling the fat, keeping it in, from jiggling. She is strong standing over the stove, ironing cloze, starched, crisp, unsmelling, unfucked. Now she is totally for them, who jump on her bosom finding familiarity and reassurance in the soft mammoth, a comfort, they wouldnt have her any other way.

6

meso

ecto

endo

MORPH

hard & muscular

tall & thin

soft & round

which are you?

which would you rather be?



Carrie Cooperider

7

Fat people are hated.

"... work has been done to delineate the ways in which these body types are perceived by others on the basis of shared cultural beliefs. ... the endomorph (rounded) body type was clearly seen as perjorative. The endomorph was described with words like lazy, mean, and dirty, while such words as strong, friendly, healthy, and brave were used to describe the mesomorph.

... this was believed in general by all people (fat, thin, or athletic) it was found that wite male and female school children wished to and did keep greater distance from the endomorph than the other two body types. ... Dyrenforth, Freeman and Wooley examined the attitudes of *pre-school age* (emphasis mine) children in an effort to find the age at which such concepts emerge. When presented with two life-size rag dolls, identical in every way except corpulence, 91% of the children who expressed a preference indicated they preferred the thin doll over the fat doll ... it was striking to note that although three of the overweight children correctly identified themselves as being 'like' the fat doll, all three preferred the thin doll. ... obese high school seniors were found to be accepted for college admission less often than normal-weight girls.

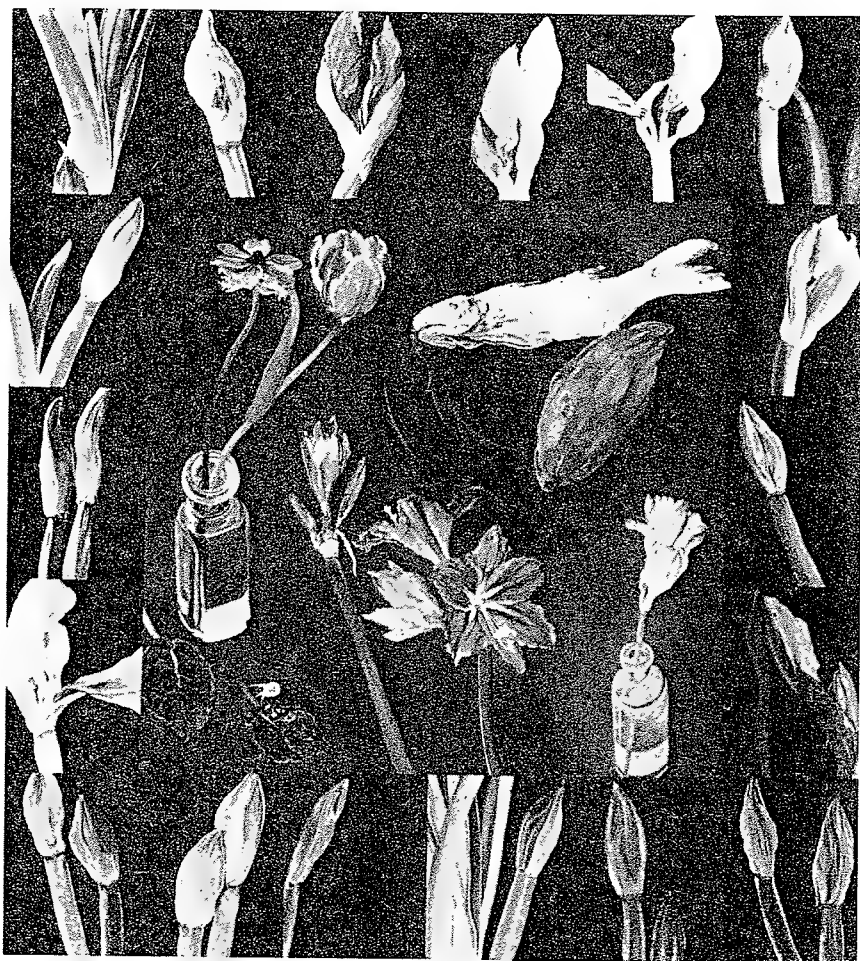
The obese were less likely to be helped out by strangers than the normal-weight people."¹

Did ya hear what I said? i said: FAT PEOPLE ARE HATED.

1 A Woman's Body in a Man's World: A Review on Findings on Body Image and Weight Control by Susan Dyrenforth, Orlando W. Wooley, Susan C. Wooley.

Sapphire is a writer, black, poet, lesbian.

Carrie Cooperider is a visual artist living in Brooklyn.



Gwen Fabricant, *Around the Fish*.

For My Mother

by Ona Gritz

*How awkward I must have made you
pulling all your weight
dead center and forward
to accommodate my forming.
You say I ruined your teeth
robbing you of calcium
the way sometimes
I go through your closet
taking only what I must have.
I wonder at two women,
having shared the same body for months,
craving the same foods,
pulled by the same needs,
each bracing her weight
against this simple fact.*

WHY

BIOGRAPHY: I weighed 6¾ pounds at birth. When I was fourteen, I weighed 142. At eighteen, at my full height of 5½ feet, I weighed 155. Ten weeks after graduation from college I was married, and on my honeymoon I weighed 186. Two years later my husband went into the Army, and I stayed home and went on a high-protein diet; when he came back, I weighed 146. Three years later, after my first child was born, I weighed 159. Two years later, after my second child was born, I weighed 169. I went on a low-protein diet and lost 15 pounds. Just before my third child was born, I weighed (pregnant, but nevertheless) 194 pounds. After she was born, I weighed 177 for a long time.

When she was three and I was thirty-five, I fell in love and lost a lot of weight. I went to Weight Watchers and came out weighing 157 pounds, which was short of my goal. A year later, still in love, I weighed 146 pounds. I bought a pair of white pants. At my son's Bar Mitzvah I weighed 162 pounds. After that I got depressed, and my weight dropped to 148 pounds. I had my first malted milk in fourteen years. I wore the white pants again, bought a Size Ten dress, and wore a horizontally-striped tank suit in a snapshot taken by my husband on a beach in Jamaica. I also had a photographer friend take a set of naked photographs of me to remember myself by.

A card from Weight Watchers dated April 2, 1972, says I weighed 161½ pounds. Three weeks later, I'm down for 158½. That year I fell in love briefly, lost weight, and joined a consciousness-raising group. The next spring I went to Paris and hated myself because I felt fat and dowdy. I took some speed pills my mother gave me, but they hopped me up too much. When I stopped smoking, I weighed 156 pounds. When I went to my first artists' colony, I weighed 162 pounds. My husband and I almost split up, and I lost some weight. In 1977, when my first novel came out, I weighed 168 pounds. In 1980 I wrote a magazine article about a woman who had lost 235 pounds and was so impressed that I lost twelve pounds myself. On June 10, 1983, the day of my son's wedding and a week before the publication of my second novel, I weighed 167 pounds. Last year I weighed in for my Pap test at 184

I OVEREAT

by ROLAINE HOCHSTEIN



pounds. I took some lessons in Alexander Technique. In December 1984, on the day of my final exam in Messianic Ideas and Movements in Jewish History, I weighed 169 pounds. ♦♦

To fill the abyss.
To mortify the flesh.
So I can be bigger than he is.
To comfort the dying.
To clean up the icebox.
To keep the edges straight
(cakes, pies, lasagne).
To support the economy.
To be social.
To stimulate the senses.
To activate the engine.
To fuel the fire.
To see how it tastes.
To pass the time.
To coat the raw ends.
To numb the sore spots.

To quiet the pangs.
To cool the fires.
To disarm the enemy.
To avert aggression.
To divert hostility.
To deliver me from temptation.
To fill out my frame.
To share the wealth.
To mystify the curious.
To get back at my mother.
To return to childhood.
To rival my father.
To frustrate my friends.
To outdo my children.
To challenge my shrink.
To defy the world.
To sustain the spirit.
To discourage extramarital sex.
To soothe the beast.
To contain the beast.

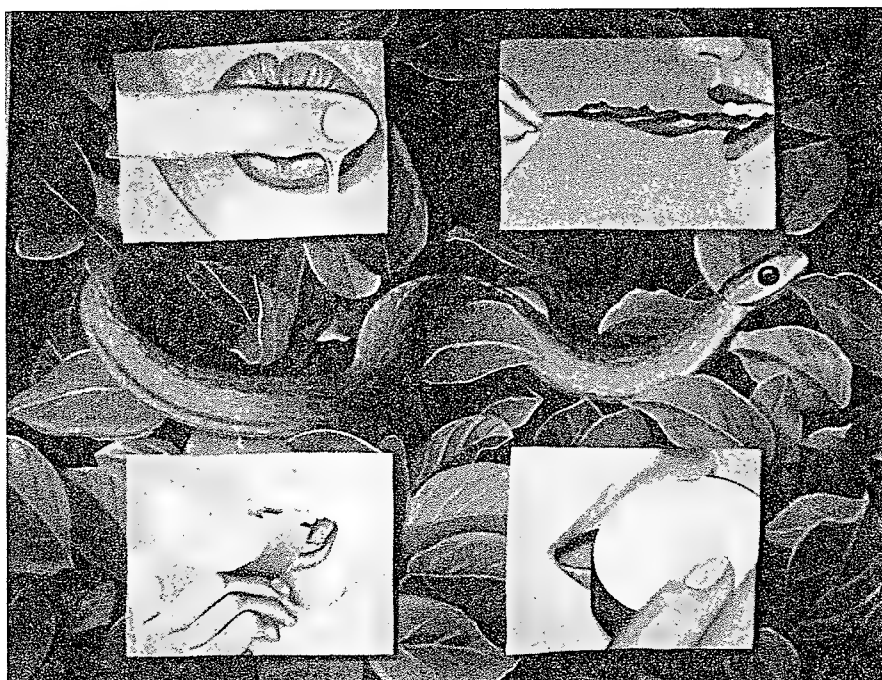
To build a fortress.
To cushion the blows.
To annoy my husband.
To disgust myself.
Because I never learned to
say no to myself.
Because I'm hungry.
Because the menu makes it
sound so attractive.
Because I hate to disappoint.
Because it's there.

Gwen Fabricant is a painter who lives and works in New York City. She teaches at Smith College in Massachusetts.

Ona Gritz is pursuing a M.A. in the creative writing program at NYU. She is an editor of *Slow Motion Magazine*, a poetry publication based in Brooklyn where she now lives.

Rolaine Hochstein is a novelist and short-story writer working in the NJ writer-in-the-classroom program. She is married and has three grown children.

Elyse Taylor is a visual artist living in Brooklyn. She has a B.F.A. from Boston University and has had solo exhibitions in NYC and Boston.



Elyse Taylor, *Mmmm Good*, oil on canvas.

INSPIRATIONAL VEGETABLES &



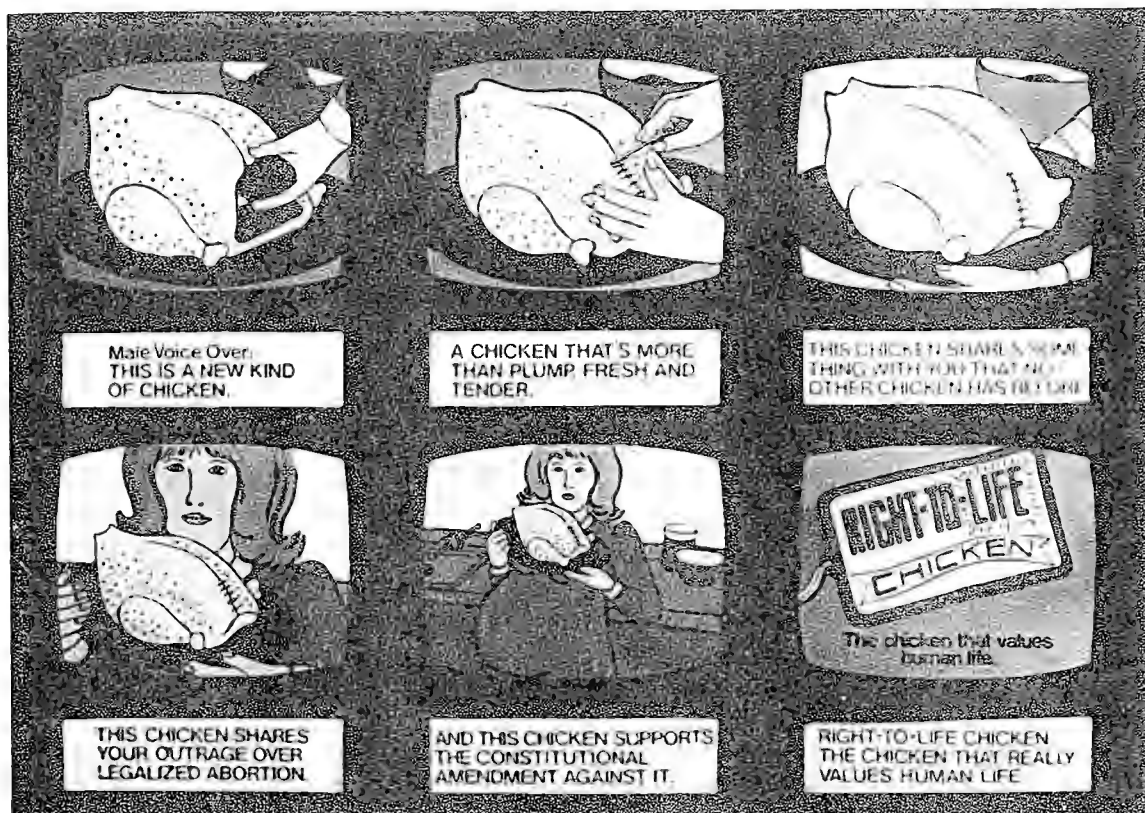
Erica Rothenberg,
*Inspirational
Vegetables*,
mixed media, 1986



All photographs courtesy of P.P.O.W. Gallery.

Erica Rothenberg is a political, feminist artist from NYC currently living in California.
She is represented by P.P.O.W. Gallery, NYC.

& MORALLY SUPERIOR PRODUCTS



Male Voice Over:
THIS IS A NEW KIND
OF CHICKEN.

A CHICKEN THAT'S MORE
THAN PLUMP FRESH AND
TENDER.

THIS CHICKEN SHARES A SPECIAL
THING WITH YOU THAT NO
OTHER CHICKEN HAS TOY ONE.

THIS CHICKEN SHARES
YOUR OUTRAGE OVER
LEGALIZED ABORTION.

AND THIS CHICKEN SUPPORTS
THE CONSTITUTIONAL
AMENDMENT AGAINST IT.

RIGHT-TO-LIFE CHICKEN
THE CHICKEN THAT REALLY
VALUES HUMAN LIFE.

Born-Again Chicken, 1982

Erica Rothenberg



Woman: MY SPAGHETTI
SAUCE TASTES LIKE I
MADE IT MYSELF...

...AND MY FAMILY JUST
LOVES IT.

BUT WHAT'S REALLY
IMPORTANT TO ME
IS THIS:


MY SPAGHETTI SAUCE
IS AGAINST RACISM.

AND IF YOU WANT THIS TO
BE A BETTER WORLD, YOU'LL
WANT THIS ON YOUR PASTA.

Voice Over: PROGRESSO.
THE SAUCE THAT FIGHTS
RACISM.

Equal Opportunity Sauce, acrylic on paper, 1982

Erica Rothenberg



NUCLEAR FOOD

by Clarissa Sligh

While on vacation, as I was leafing leisurely through the Sunday *New York Times*, I came across a long article about food on page two of the Business Section. For a moment I thought I was reading the Home Section, but a quick glance at the page heading assured me that I wasn't. Then I discovered the article wasn't one, but two articles. The first was in favor of, and the second opposed to, a recent Food and Drug Administration rule allowing the IRRADIATION of fresh fruits and vegetables, pork, and grains for the first time and tripling the dose currently allowed to be used on spices. What food irradiation was, and why it was or was not desirable, was treated very differently by the two writers.

The tone of the first article, "A Healthy Way to Extend Food Life," annoyed me. It was written as if the reader was an elementary school kid to whom the rules of a new game were being explained: "Irradiation involves radiant or light energy that passes through food... It is not unlike passing a briefcase through an airport scanning machine... The briefcase is perfectly safe to handle when it comes out the other side... The food industry welcomes this technology as another option among a wide variety of modern food preservation methods..."

The second article, "The F.D.A.'s Game

of 'Genetic Roulette'," sent the bio-tech word GENE-SPLICING racing through my mind. I thought it might be more interesting than the first. However, the article's predictions of impending doom almost drove me to crumple up my newspaper more than once. Who wants to read this crap while sitting on a beach in Fire Island?

But a masochistic sense of my duty to be an informed citizen won out. This is the gist of what the author said: "One would think, after the accident at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, that the Government would have developed a healthy skepticism about nuclear technology... [it's] reminiscent of the Government assurances about the safety of fallout from nuclear tests in Nevada... Each plant requires the use of one million to 10 million curies of radiation to operate—the equivalent of concentrating all the long-lived radiation from a one megaton nuclear explosion... [plant workers] will be at risk of immediate death from radiation sickness should they be exposed." If a worker opens the wrong door...

I was aghast. The article read like a piece of science fiction, but I knew it wasn't because it was in the Business Section of the *New York Times*. Then I got angry. I go to health food stores and pay a premium for natural food. Even then I can't know whether my natural food has been irradiated—there is no current requirement to label irradiated food. Moreover, there is no test the Government can use to check whether it has been irradiated, even though the radiation dosage for food will be 200 times the lethal exposure for human beings.

I tried to discuss the subject with my friends on the beach. They did not want to know or talk about it. This vacation was our only opportunity to tune out the world. Not trusting my strong negative emotions, I decided I must be overreacting.

A few days later, I called several of my "health-nut" friends and casually asked them what they had thought about the articles. None had seen them. Their Business Sections had been discarded along with the other sections that were never read. However, they'd all heard about FOOD IRRADIATION and were able to give me additional information.

I read all the material I could get my hands on. I learned how food irradiation worked. Gamma radiation from radioactive cobalt-60 (half-life: 5.3 years) or cesium-137 (half-life: 30.2 years) is beamed through foods to preserve them. The food does not become radioactive, but some cells are altered by the radiation. Mutations are formed. The gamma rays damage DNA, the "blueprint" for cell division which is contained in all living cells. The more complex the organism, the larger and more radiation-sensitive its molecules of DNA are, and small radiation doses can do it damage. Thus, small doses (100 kilorads) can prevent onions and potatoes from sprouting and kill or sterilize insects, but larger doses (1,000 kilorads or more) are required to kill bacteria and viruses.

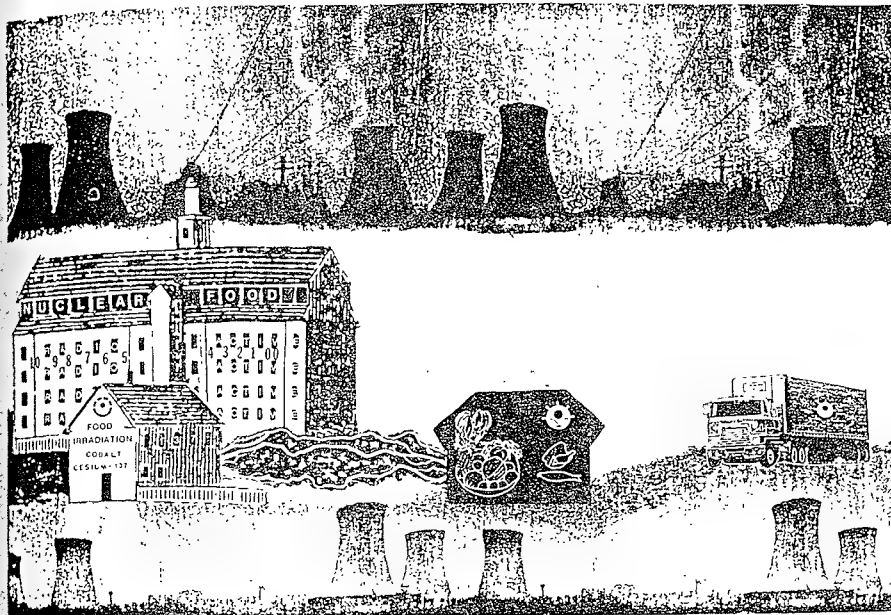
Then I compared the benefits versus the hazards of food irradiation.

BENEFITS

1. Food irradiation is effective in eliminating bacteria. It preserves food and gives it a longer shelf life than the chemical preservatives currently in use.

2. Food irradiation plants use cesium-137, which is created as a byproduct of making plutonium for atom bombs. The U.S. Department of Commerce reports:





Clarissa Sligh, *Nuclear Food*, xerox collage.

"Food irradiation will substantially reduce the disposal costs of nuclear waste."

3. It may eliminate many chemical sprays used to preserve stored food.

4. It might be an alternative to some chemical preservatives.

5. It will make some people very wealthy.

HAZARDS

1. Irradiation creates new chemicals in foods called "radiolytic" products, including hazardous compounds such as benzene, peroxide, and formaldehyde. Some studies show that irradiated foods cause cancer, kidney and liver disease, birth defects, and other problems when fed to animals. Other studies, however, suggest that "radiolytic" products can be consumed safely.

2. Radiation depletes vitamins and minerals in food just as cooking does.

Since foods will later be cooked, there will be an even greater nutritional loss than from cooking alone.

3. Agriculturalists say crops must still be sprayed in the field, and then, after irradiation, will have to be treated again with chemicals to prevent re-infestation of produce. So food will be irradiated in addition to being chemically sprayed.

4. Bacteria and viruses can develop resistance to radiation, just as insects do to pesticides. Dangerous mutations and new strains of pest organisms may develop.

5. The microorganisms that cause meat to smell or look spoiled may be killed by the irradiation process, but others requiring a stronger dosage could survive. Thus meat that might be contaminated could appear to be harmless.

6. The transportation and disposal of radioactive materials used in the food irradiation process could become prob-

lematic. An accident or mishandling of radioactive materials could cause large land areas to become permanently uninhabitable. Some workers in a New Jersey food irradiation plant actually threw some contaminated water down shower drains into public sewers.

7. Workers in food irradiation plants would be at risk of immediate death should they be exposed to the radioactive materials.

8. The Food and Drug Administration's current labeling requirements exempt identifying irradiated ingredients. Additionally, the FDA has no empirical tests to detect irradiated foods; therefore, agency regulations are unenforceable.

Clearly, the hazards of food irradiation outweigh the gains. Then why is it being done? Once more the political and economic interests of a government-business combination are antithetical to the health and well-being of its consumer citizens. Food goes into our bodies. Unhealthy food makes unhealthy people. We are back to the times of "Let the consumer beware!"

Let yourself be heard on this issue. Write to the Health & Energy Institute for information on how to get in touch with a consumer protection group in your area. This private organization advocates the preservation of a healthy environment, the wise use of energy resources and safe technologies, and the protection of human health and life. ♣

Health & Energy Institute, 236 Massachusetts Ave. N.E., No. 506, Washington, D.C. 20002.

Clarissa Sligh grew up black and female in the southeastern United States. Her work derives from life experiences including the early Manned Space Flight Program, Wall Street, living with an activist Jewish husband, and adventures in the Far East, Africa, and Europe. As the journey of her life continues to unfold, it becomes increasingly her art.



DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

is our mother

The Hopi's Spiritual Connection to Their Staple Food

excerpts from a film by Pat Ferrero, *Hopi: Songs Of the Fourth World*, with commentary from the film's resource handbook.

This film depicts the world of Hopi through the eyes of people who have experienced life in that world...and tries to show Hopi culture as an adaptive and viable force that has sustained the Hopis, as a people, from time immemorial. It is a film that focuses on the historic continuity of Hopism, even as it has undergone change in response to both internal cultural needs and external contacts with other peoples.³

Along with beans and squash, corn has provided the basis of unirrigated cultivation in a region that appears to be too arid for farming. As the staple food, it is served in some form at every meal and so figures prominently in traditional food-preparing activities. It also has an important place in ritual activities: "Corn appears in virtually every Hopi ceremony either as corn meal, or as an actual ear of corn, or as a symbolic painting." ... Archaeologists suggest that the Hopi received maize cultivation around three thousand years ago from casual contacts with nomadic bands from Mexico ... The Hopi say, instead, that Maasawu, who greeted the Hopi on their emergence into the Fourth World, gave them corn and the digging stick for planting it at that time, saying "Pay nu' panis sooya'yta," ("I have only the digging stick; if you want to live my way, that's the way you have to live.")²

Editor's note: To preserve their privacy, the Hopi speakers from the film will be referred to by their first initial only.

Material set in italics are excerpts from the film *Hopi: Songs of the Fourth World*, © Ferrero Films; the excerpts preceded by initials are the voices of the many Hopi speakers who appear in the hour-long film. The interspersed commentary is from a series of essays that are part of the study guide that accompanies the film, © Ferrero Films.

Excerpts from the study guide are by: ¹ Carlotta Connelly, ² Mary E. Black, ³ Emory Sekaquaptewa, ⁴ Hartman Lomawaima.

Mary Black's essay in the study guide, "Corn as Metaphor," appeared in full in *Ethnology*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, October, 1984. Used in the study guide courtesy of Mary E. Black.

Rentals and sales of the film and study guide information is available from *New Day/Ferrero Films*, 1259A Folsom Street, San Francisco, CA 94103, 415-626-3456.

Narrator: To the Hopi, life is part of an infinite pattern, a continuum of cycles within cycles. The spinning of the planets is reflected in the cycle of the seasons, and the circular journey of human life mirrors this larger pattern.

The Hopi believe they emerged from below into this world after three prior worlds had begun and ended.

S: When our people emerged from the world below, the Great Spirit gave all people a choice of destiny by offering them different corn. We chose the smallest ear of blue corn. This corn would sustain us in a hard but enduring life.

E: We have a commitment to raise the corn. We committed ourselves to live by that law and the law is the corn.

Narrator: The Hopi plant where the sandy soil protects moisture below, and in the flood plains, where the few inches of precious rain, flowing from the mesas, feed the plants. Farming here is an art, an act of faith.

E: The working of the corn is a very sacred thing. Because there's no irrigation, it's conscious preservation of every drop of moisture in the ground. And so, when a Hopi farmer comes to plant, he has to push this dry surface away and eventually, he gets down to the moist dirt, and then into this soft place, he puts the seed. The very sacredness of life is corn, and it is this sacredness which keeps the Hopi coming back out to his field, even though looking at it strictly economically, it seems futile to see Hopis come out and do the work in the way that they do it when it could be done a lot more efficiently.

The planting stick is a magical stick that carries with it all of this knowledge.

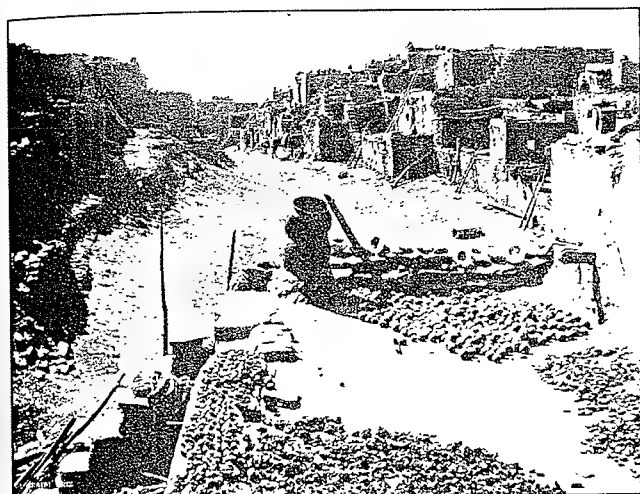


CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY/TITLE INSURANCE AND TRUST CO. (L.A.)

S: Our Hopi world has its own directions. These are the points of the sun marked along the horizon. They show the summer and the winter solstices. These points determine the time for planting and ceremonials.

The various colors of corn signify the cardinal directions of the Hopi world: beginning always with yellow corn for the northwesterly point, and moving counterclockwise with blue-green for the southwesterly point, red for the southeasterly point, and white for the northeasterly point.¹

E: Yellow clouds, yellow butterflies, yellow corn the good things of life for the people are always yellow.



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Blue corn, blue butterflies, blue clouds, the kinds of blue that you see on kachinas.

The third direction is tattkiak, red. The red corn, or red flowers, red butterflies, red clouds.

The fourth direction is white, white corn, white flowers, white butterflies, white clouds.

In the Hopi lexicon, the importance of corn is reflected in the large number of terms that refer to types of corn, parts of the plant, stages in plant development, stages in the grinding of cornmeal, and corn-based dishes. Additionally, corn figures in a number of metaphors that appear regularly in speech, frequently, but not exclusively in the context of ritual song. Two of the most prevalent Hopi metaphors pertaining to corn [are] "People are corn" and "Corn plants are females."²

E: The corn, in Mother Earth, in its womb, is born by emerging out of the ground. And it is treated as a newborn, with all of the loving care and all of the right attitude, cheerfulness that the person is capable of bringing. You know, you'd think that talking to plants was some new idea. The Hopis have always done it.

F: As the corn grows, one farmer must be singing. It doesn't need any special song, but there must be music along with the growth of the corn.

WOMEN'S SPECIAL RELATION TO CORN

Metaphors for corn as female entity (themselves subsets of the People-are-corn metaphor) rely on two principal metaphors, "Young corn plants are maidens," and "Corn is our mother."

During ceremonials, corn plants are almost always referred to in song as *manatu*, unmarried girls or maidens, instead of as *humi'uyi*, corn plants. *Manatu* may be prefixed by the color of the corn crop, as in the song below, or by other descriptions. The Long Hair katsina song tells of the rains it is hoped will be coming during the hot summer growing season.

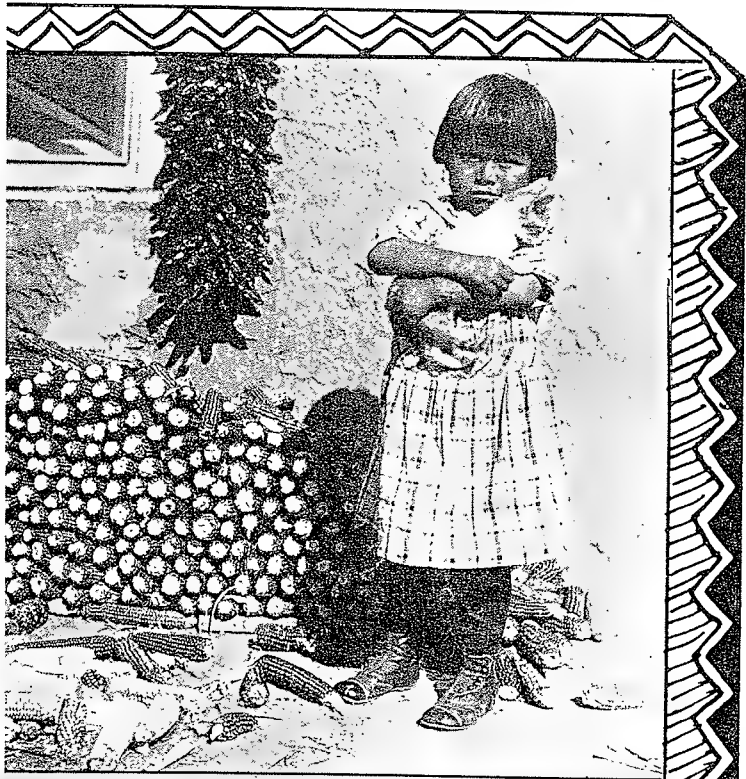
Qootsap qaaoo maanatu	White corn maidens
sakwaap qaaoo manatuu	blue corn maidens
Umuungem natuuwaniwa	for your benefit they are raised in
taal'aangwnawita.	the growing season.
Uraa aawupog	As you know, when it is going to
yookvaaniquoo	rain all over the land.
aatkyaaww suuvuuyooayangw	from down below, a steady rain
uumumii pcw	comes falling to you here
yoochoyoooyootaangwu	the rain moving along steadily.

Once the plants reach the state of development known as *talaa kuyva* (tassles emerging), they are seen to be like virgins awaiting fertilization/pollination. In *Korosta Katsina Tawi*, a katsina song recorded by Natalie Curtis, the corn plants are referred to as *humi manatu*, "seed corn flower" or "pollen"-bearing maidens:

sikyavolimu humisi manatuy	Yellow butterflies, while going
	along beautifying themselves
talasiyamuy	with the tassel flowers of the corn
pitsangwatimakyangw	pollen maidens
tuvenagoyimani	colorfully chase each other
sakwawolimu morisi manatuy	Blue butterflies, while going along
	painting themselves
talasiyamuy	with the tassel flowers of the bean
pitsangwatimakyangw	pollen maidens
tuvenagoyimani	colorfully chase each other
humi manatuy amunawita	Among the corn pollen maidens
taatangayatu,	the bees will hum and do their
tookiyuuyuwintani	dance
morisi manatuy amunawita	Among the bean pollen maidens
taatangayatu,	the bees will hum and do their
tookiyuuyuwintani	dance
umuu uyuy amunawita	Among your plants
yoy'umtimani taawanawit	all day long the thundering rain
	will fall
umuu uyuy amunawita	Among your plants
yoy'umtimani taawanawit	all day long the thundering rain
	will fall

The fertility theme underlying conceptualizations about women and corn is further evidenced by the use of the term *poshumi* in reference to both. It refers to both the kernels of corn retained and used for germinating future crops, and to the young women of a clan that are capable of bearing children, who assure the continuation of the matrilineal line. When the ears of corn begin to develop, it is said that the plant is *timu'yva* (has come to have children), the ears being *timat* (its children). Thus, in a sense, the plant reaches womanhood.

Adapted from study guide material contributed by Mary E. Black



The ears of corn become “mother” to the humans who cared for them—in the literal sense of actual nourishment, and figuratively as *tsotsmingwu*, the perfect ears of corn that are “mother” to initiates and infants. The nourishment and energy received from corn in turn allow the humans to continue to care for young plants. Humans may die, become *qatungwu*, but the continuation of human life is assured by *poshumi* and sustained by nourishment from the corn mother. Thus the life cycles of corn and humans complement one another and repeat through the ages. Is it any wonder, then, that the mutual interdependence of corn and humankind is represented and emphasized so frequently and powerfully in ritual?²

Narrator: The sweet corn is baked by its own steam in a pit. Two ears, representing Mother and Father Corn, are wrapped in wild herbs and offered to the spirits of the six directions. The first ear is thrown into the bottom of the pit, and the corn is heaped upon it.

H: When the sweet corn is ready to bake, they invite all the friends. And the man who keeps up the fire stays there all day long keeping up the fire.

Early in the morning, the same one who was keeping the fire will go early and open it up. Then he'll invite all the spirits to come and eat first, in a loud voice. “The spirits from the east, come and partake of this corn.” That's what he say.

And then he stays there and lets the steam come out to cool it off and then they take it out and then husk it.

Narrator: This first ear of corn, the father corn, is eaten by all who are there.

H: And it's just very sweet; it's nice, really.

Narrator: Wherever there is mist, steam, moisture, breath, there is life and the kachinas are present.

E: We emerged in this world the same way the corn emerges. After a while it gets to the point where the leaves out of their weight fall back to the ground as though for support. We lean on Mother Earth for support.

Corn and land are symbolized in Hopi songs and prayer rituals as Mother, possessing the gift of nourishment from whom all life on earth receives sustenance. The terms *Qa'ömanatu* (corn maidens) and *Tuwapongtumsi* (earth maiden) are typical words in songs to describe the female powers of fertility.³

One of the women's songs heard in the film is a Hopi-Tewa grinding song, part of the traditional song lore. Such a song would have been sung by young girls, grinding in the evenings and hoping for their chosen boys to come to their peepholes, as in the courting scenes nostalgically recalled in the film.¹

H: The girls, they used to go out to the edge of the village after the dance, you know, in the evening. So the girls all sit down in a row and then when the boys come, they stand behind them, you know. And then they sing songs, like serenading them. And they are not allowed to visit with each other at any time during the day. The only time they can visit is at night when the girls grind corn.

The door is latched and the mother sees that no one comes in. And they have the little hole where they can talk to each other, and that's the only way they can visit. If a boy is whispering from outside and the girl doesn't want to talk to him, she doesn't stop grinding.

She usually knows when the right one comes, you know. And she might stop grinding and talk to him. And of course the first time the mother knows that she isn't grinding, she gets up and goes and investigates and ask her who is the boy, and she'll tell him. And if she doesn't approve, then she said not to talk to him. And if it's the boy she approves of, she lets her visit with him.

In Hopi storytelling, Spider Woman is a central figure. The spirit of Spider Woman represents all earthly knowledge. Spider Woman was instrumental in making the world habitable for humans. She is believed to be the driving force behind discovery and invention. The spirit and prominence of Spider Woman is manifested in the Hopi matrilineal tradition, where everything is of the woman's house—children, household goods and equipment, artistry, farming plots, orchards, etc.

The Hopi are a matrilineal, as well as a matrilineal, people. In the Hopi world, the family unit consists of all blood-related and clan-related members—the clans themselves being large extended families. Since the Hopi have a matrilineal kinship system, clan identification is passed along to the children through the mother's side of the family. If your mother is sun clan, for example, then you are a Sun clan member. Hopi clans are also exogamous, which means that a member of a given clan cannot marry a member of the same clan.⁴

S: At Hopi, our weddings are a process that may take years. Corn, robes, and baskets are made and exchanged before the ceremonials are completed.

R: My mother took me to my husband's parents, y'know, and I stayed there and I had to grind corn for three days straight, y'know. There's a lot of women that help the bride prepare the cornmeal for the feast, and it's hard work and a lot of ladies and mens come to the feast.

Narrator: The corn is stacked and stored until needed. Then the moist, blue corn is ground and mounded in bowls, pottery jars, and metal tubs. Many Hopi foods are made with blue cornmeal, but piki is special to Hopi. It is a paperthin bread that Hopi have eaten for a thousand years.

R: When you make piki, you have the blue cornmeal and the ashes. Just put a little bit and it will color the whole batter. This is our bread. When I put my first touch on the stone, it's hot. Your fingers have to get used to it.

Narrator: The valuable piki stones undergo a long and laborious process of treating and seasoning to prepare their smooth surface. They are considered heirlooms and a good piki stone will be cherished for generations. While making piki, Hopi women can use various agents to grease the stone, including sheep brains, deer spinal cord, watermelon seeds or (more recently) peanut butter . . .

Making piki is part of daily life as well as a necessary preparation for a birth, a wedding, or a ceremonial. Women make vast stacks of piki for the wedding feast.

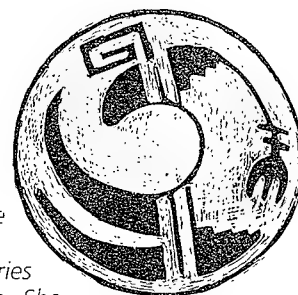
The wedding preparations continue as the groom's father or clan uncles weave the bridal robes, and the bride's mother and family make a special basket for the groom.

The fertility theme underlying conceptualizations about women and corn is...evidenced by the use of the term *poshumi* in reference to both. It refers to both the kernals of corn retained and used for germinating future crops, and to the young women of a clan that are capable of bearing children, who assure the continuation of the matrilineal line.²

Narrator: In her arms, the bride holds the wedding sash. On each side, corn tassels and fringes are symbols of rain and

growth. The red dots above the tassel at the base of her gown symbolize the months of blood that nourish the embryo... The red rings and threads, encircling the tassels are the veins in the uterus that feed the child...

A bride, like a corn stalk, carries the capacity for bearing children. She carries the future.



A symbiotic and complementary relationship is seen to pertain to corn and humans. Young plants are cared for as children by people; if they are properly cared for, encouraged and prayed for, they are able to mature from maidenhood to maturity. After "bearing children" and being harvested, the plants die, become corpses (*qatungwu*). Their lines of life are carried on in the ears of corn, some of which become *poshumi* for the next germination cycle.²

E: The corn plant is like the human body, a body in which life resides. The ears are the children of the stalk, just like children are offspring of men and women.

Mother Corn is a perfect ear of corn which survives the profane world of insects and bugs and crows and turns up with kernels all the way to its end. This corn plays a role as a mother, as you go from one phase of life to the next phase.

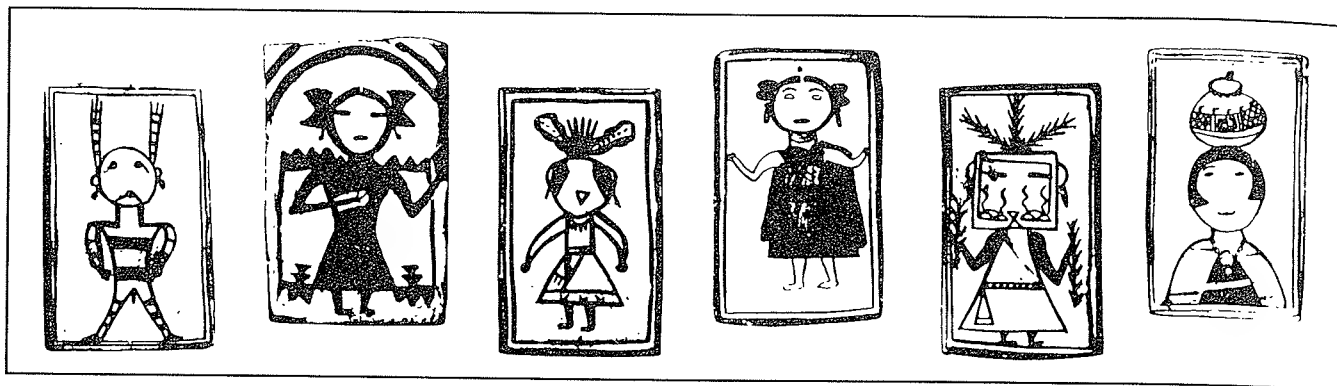
Narrator: When a child is born, it is cared for by its mother and aunts in a darkened room for 20 days.

At dawn, the child, protected by a perfect ear of Mother Corn, is presented to the sun in its naming ceremony. A pinch of fine, white cornmeal is put into the baby's mouth.

H: And they say, this is what we eat on this earth. And so you eat that, too. You have come to the earth to eat this kind of food, that's what they tell the baby.

E: May you live free from pain, and may you live long and go to sleep from old age.





Corn is the staple food and is prepared for eating in several different ways—from its fresh state to its preserved dry state. Spiritually, corn is used to “feed” the katsinas by sprinkling cornmeal on them, as well as to consecrate a pathway on which the katsinas enter the village. It is also used to carry the message of prayer, when it is deposited at the appropriate shrine for a ceremony.

The katsinas who are masters of *Natwani* (or the art of raising corn and other plants) come to visit the Hopi people, through ceremonies, from midwinter through midsummer. Their songs admonish the people, if they are wanting in their reverential attitude toward the essence of *Natwani*...³

Narrator: The Hopi believe that when they die, their last breath—their spirit—becomes a cloud, and the clouds that bring the rain are powerful spirit forces called *kachinas*.

E: *Kachinas* become clouds. They travel. They have this power to make life. And so the Hopis look to the *kachinas* for this life blood called rain.

Narrator: From winter to the summer solstice, the *kachinas* come from their mountain homes to the plazas to dance.

The *kachinas* help the people prepare for the time of planting, a preparation that takes place first in the hearts and minds of the people. “Be faithful, keep your thoughts happy so that your crops will emerge straight and tall.” For the Hopi, thoughts and prayers, wishes and feelings, all affect the balance of the world around them.

M: But when we see the clouds forming, we know they are coming. We can’t say it’s our people that are coming. We say, *kachinas* are coming!

E: May our hard labor, prayer, our sacrifices come to fruition in rain, clouds, corn, growth, life.

The Hopi world is a world where cooperation is very important for survival, as against competition. People need each other. Traditionally speaking, in Hopi you don’t have formal training of young people. They are respected as human beings who come to realize their own potential in their own time. The Hopi culture teaches us cooperation without submission.

Narrator: The game of bone dolls, taught by the grandmother, is a map of the child’s life. Women’s traditional skills are still passed down face to face from mother to daughter.

H: We’re building houses for the dolls to live in. The family will be the father and then the mother and then the children. Three children and then the grandmother so she can help take care of the children.

We call this the grinding stone. You should start right now so we will have plenty of time to grind a lot of corn. It’s a girls’ game, of course. It gets so interesting that sometimes boys come around and watch, you know.

When the new day comes, each person has a duty, and the mother assigns the daughters to do something, and if the father has sons, he will give them jobs, you know.



MUSEUM OF NORTHERN ARIZONA, FLAGSTAFF

M: In the Hopi belief, if you want to teach a person the history of the song that is deeply connected to our history, you feed them corn. You're planting history into this person. You are planting your song into this person. That way that history will grow inside him. Planting is really a life of Hopi.

E: The corn stalks are just the form, katimwa, and katimwa is also the name for your body. When you die, your spirit leaves the body, what's left is katimwa. That's the thing of this earth. It stays right here and becomes a part of this earth. And the Hopi belief is that life goes on, that we go through a life cycle, and make a transition into the next one. We are looking with hope to the next world.

If you're faithful, you don't just sit back and say 'I'm faithful'. You are going to have to show industry, generosity, happiness, and hope. And how do you manifest these things but that you go out there and put the seed in the ground because you've got faith that it will endure. ••



MUSEUM OF NORTHERN ARIZONA, FLAGSTAF

The Women Who Feed the World

VILLAGE WOMEN AND THIRD WORLD POLITICS

A thread runs through women's lives, which leads them from defenselessness to responsibility. From children fed by their own mothers they become the mothers who feed the world's children—the women who grow, harvest, thresh, bake, brew, trade, and store so much of the world's food.

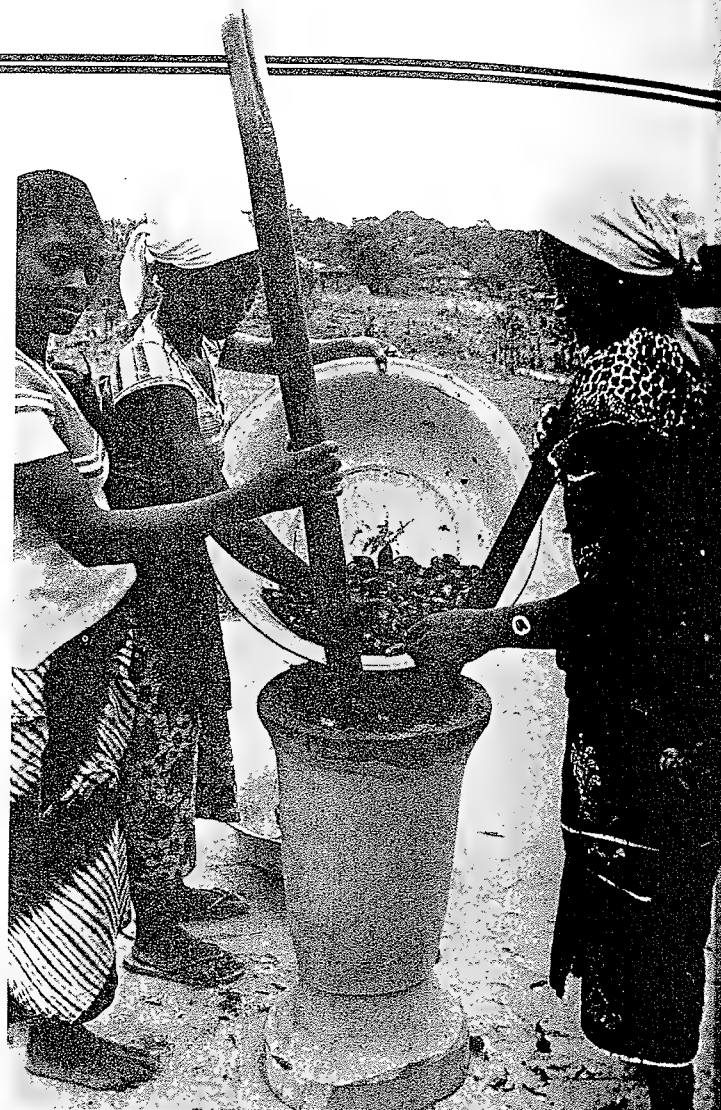
In all this work women are handicapped by sexual stereotyping and role segregation. The roles they are expected to assume are said to be particularly suited to women and are often clothed in ritual trappings that muffle women's chances to assume new roles. The figure of Demeter, who assured the Greeks of their harvests, strides through the world's fields.

Although she is expected to provide much of the food for her family and community, the woman farmer is rarely brought into the development process or consulted on technological and other solutions to food supply problems, and she is often frozen out of cash-earning agricultural ventures. Her relegation to the margins of a country's agricultural plans increases the insecurity of her position—and the insecurity of her country's homegrown food supply.

In the articles that follow, two of which were delivered as speeches in Nairobi at the nongovernmental counterpart to the UN's conference on its Decade for Women third-world women discuss their challenges. They call to mind the problems faced by the small farmer throughout the developing nations, but we should not think our own agricultural situation here in the United States is so divorced from theirs. Of the many difficulties discussed in the articles, a great number are also weaknesses of our own farming scene: a buildup of fertilizer salts that leaches into water supplies, erosion and depletion of soils, deforestation, less genotypic diversity in seeds, the stranglehold of commodity dealers and weaknesses in the distribution system, the debt crisis brought by heavy investment in expensive capital equipment, farmers being forced off the land by large-scale commercial agriculture, and the vulnerability of farm economies based on monoculture. Our corn and wheat farmers are finding out today what Filippino sugar planters have already discovered.

We must act on the words of Margaret Snyder of the United Nations Development Fund for Women: "Women are not just the victims of crisis. They are not just the objects of welfare. Women are the potential agents of profound change. They are the backbones of the economies of innumerable countries."

—KB for the Heresies 21 collective



AFRICA'S FOOD CRISIS: PRICE OF IGNORING VILLAGE WOMEN?

by Sithembiso Nyoni

In international terms, I am not a very important woman, but because I am directly engaged in struggle I am very important to hear. My community and I are in the midst of a food crisis. So we are interested in sustainable agriculture not for luxury, not for earning more money, but for our very survival.

Even at the village level we are very aware that the main causes of our food crisis are economic and political. It is a direct result of governments and multinationals taking over control and the means of production from us, the people, who should have the right to feed ourselves.

We are also aware that this food crisis is directly related to Africa's environmental crisis. In my village, when I was a little girl, we used to have many trees around and water used to flow out of springs. Today my children do not know what a spring is, because the water table has lowered so much.

Sustainable agriculture, which is controlled by and directly benefits the poor, is a very important component of national stability and national security. It also directly affects our environment. My immediate environment is the basis of my village

economy and my survival. It is from the land, after all, that I get my food. It is from the land around me that I get my fuelwood and my water. If the land around me declines, my means of survival—even the possibility of it—declines.

As a woman, the environmental decline means that I have to walk long miles to fetch firewood and water and I have very little time to grow vegetables and other food.

And because the environment in general has deteriorated, my soils have also deteriorated. So, even if I have seven children and some can go to fetch firewood and another group can go to the fields, we still will not produce as much as my grandmother did. So, if I want my agriculture to be sustainable, then my environment also must be sustainable.

Now, as I've said, this is not just my village's food crisis, not just a rural crisis, but a national crisis. From my experience coming from Zimbabwe and Southern Africa, I have discovered it is also a regional crisis.

In Mozambique, after three years of drought, the environment has deteriorated so much that food cannot be grown in some parts of the country. Thousands of families have had to move to the eastern part of Zimbabwe. My government finds that it has to look after 50,000 Mozambiquans who could not sustain their own agriculture.

As a village woman, I know what it means to be without any seeds. I know what it was in the good old days when, after harvest, I would select the seed for the following year. And I know that when I use the improved hybrid seed I can no longer do that.

When one day I was in a meeting in Harare and I stood up to say this kind of thing, the then-minister of agriculture said, "Here is a woman who wants to take people back to the eighteenth century." And yet I know that before I had control over my seed; now that I am using hybrid seed, I cannot re-use it. I have to go back to the one who controls the seed.

I know also that my well is in my field. When I come from my farming chores, I can take a bucket of water back home. But where I have used lots of fertilizer around my well, my water has been contaminated by it.

I know that if you intercrop, some crops will survive the drought even if others die. But my agricultural experts tell me not to do that because it is primitive.

I know what roots from the bush I can dig up and mix with what I grow at home in order to make a nutritious meal for my children. But the nutritionists in town think I should feed my children on Pro-Nutro.

But our rulers of today—our ministers of agriculture—are busy interlinking with the multinationals, with international cash crop markets, and they forget that we, the people, are the basis of their power. If we are starving, they should be ashamed. They have the power to ask for more aid for our poverty.

If I were one of my country's rulers, I would go back to the people; now it is no longer a question of keeping up with the Joneses—it's a question of survival for the village women in Africa. Survival is a creation of the peasant who is involved in the struggle, who is taking control, who is trying to live under very difficult conditions.

If I do not control food, there is nothing else in the world I can control. ♦

Sithembiso Nyoni is an executive officer of ORAP, Organization for Rural Associations for Progress, Zimbabwe.

THE GAMBIAN WOMAN'S BURDEN

by Comba Marenah

The Gambia, occupying a 15 to 30 mile-wide band along the River Gambia, has over 800,000 people. It is one of the Sahelian countries, which have been suffering from drought for ten years now.

84 percent of the Gambian population is rural, and the women are the major subsistence food growers, farming during both the dry and the rainy seasons. They grow rice, The Gambia's staple food, and millet, sorghum, and maize as well. They also process their crops, using arduous methods such as pounding and grinding. They must attend to other traditional duties as bearers and minders of children, housekeepers, water bearers, and fuelwood gatherers.

Gambian women walk long distances in search of fuelwood. In the early 1970s, Sahelian governments banned cutting down trees and the burning of wood for charcoal without permission from the governments' forestry departments because those activities were associated with soil deterioration and desert-like conditions. Women, the prime users of firewood and charcoal, were the hardest hit by these regulations.

The Gambia's National Women's Bureau, with the cooperation of the department of forestry, introduced woodlots-cum-orchards to village women's groups, to bring firewood closer to home and to add more fruits and vegetables to their diets.

Gamelina arbores, mangoes, and guavas were among the trees planted. They provide shade where it never existed be-

continued >

Comba Marenah works for the Gambian government's Women's Bureau.

ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN

The International Women's Tribune Center is an international, nongovernmental organization set up following the International Women's Year Tribune held in Mexico City, 1975. It supports the initiatives of women throughout the Third World who are actively working to promote the more equitable and active participation of women within the development process of their country. They offer technical assistance and training, information services, and a locus for women's networking.

In one of their 1986 quarterlies, they reported on efforts to offer women appropriate technological tools to process and cook food for their families and for home or small businesses. In many parts of the world, women's contributions to family income from small enterprises are vitally necessary—even an obligation. The IWTC reports, "There are countless examples, worldwide, of 'improved' technologies that were created for women without ever consulting them. Peddle-powered technologies have been created for women who are not permitted to straddle a bicycle; solar cookers have been introduced that need constant turning during daylight hours when women are working in the fields; a Nigerian hydraulic oil press failed because, although oil pressing is traditionally a women's skill, the mortar used in the press was too large to be handled by the average woman."

On the following pages are technologies that worked.

fore and prevent soil erosion, keeping the land suitable for agriculture.

Gambian women, in another effort to preserve the soil, have also embarked on building dykes to prevent salty water from encroaching on their rice fields.

Although it is widely accepted that much of the world's food is grown by women, especially in Africa, few improved farming methods are geared toward them. Rural women have little access to appropriate technology and the support services necessary to improve productivity.

There is only one major agricultural project for women in The Gambia: the Jahally-Patchar irrigated rice project. It uses mechanized farming practices to assist women rice growers and their families, seeking to improve their farming techniques and to achieve food self-sufficiency for The Gambia.

But the sophisticated machinery used to plough the fields and to pump water onto them calls the sustainability of the project into doubt, particularly because of high maintenance costs. By May 1984, the project had cost 17 million dollars, a lot for one project in a country with few capital resources.

Traditional methods provide the only sustainable form of agriculture for Gambian women, I think. African women spend up to 80 percent of their labor on farmwork, particularly in relation to gathering and storing the harvest. One paper at this conference indicated that, although women did only 5 percent of the felling of trees and clearing of forest, women's involvement increased to 30 percent of all the plowing, 50 percent of sowing and planting, 70 percent of hoeing and weed-

ing, and 80 percent of harvesting and selling of surplus food in the market.

Traditional women's groups, such as the Njangah in Cameroon, Essusu in Sierra Leone, and Kafo in The Gambia, each have a function to play in their communities. In The Gambia, the groups are organized at the village level to provide labor for each other on member's farms, taking on such tasks as plowing and planting, in addition to the groups' other social functions.

The great merits of these groups are that they are closest to the problems and are available when needed at little or no cost. During the rainy season, for instance, they plow and plant members' fields free of charge and use payments from services sold to non-members to improve the village environment and to further community projects.

The system, however, lacks an environmentally sound and technologically appropriate mechanism for increased production and management of areas needing more labor. In part this is because of women's lack of effective land rights. Even if women's labor makes the improvements that make land a more marketable commodity, it is men who have the rights over the land. The system seriously constrains the efforts and active participation of women in agricultural development, thus losing the benefit of their skills and experience.

The time and energy spent to reach the almost inaccessible rice fields negatively affects food production. Land development efforts aimed at reducing women's drudgery should command favorable reception among donor communities. ■

WORKING AT DEVELOPMENT

The Nada Chula Stoves, Built by Women for Women

The Indian government is sponsoring a national project for the development and partial financing of improved stoves for rural women. The women of the Harijan Nada helped develop this particular model based on their need for better smoke removal from the kitchen. Rural houses, by and large, did not have chimneys, or the baffles and dampers in the stove that facilitate the chimneys' operation.

Women were trained to build the stoves for other families as a trade, and, thus, at a single stroke, the women stove manufacturers gained a new income source and the villages better stoves. The stoves are made of sun-dried slabs of mud, soil, and a clay fiber mix. They can be made in a variety of forms to suit different incomes, kitchen space, cooking needs, and aesthetic preferences, as long as the dimensions of the firebox remain constant. The stoves are not only less smokey but also more efficient in fuel use and faster in cooking times.

The Indian government has started offering subsidies to village women to allow more of them to hire the services of the women stove artisans. Several thousand of this type of stove have been built successfully.

Grating Cassava for Bread-Making Enterprises

The members of the Lu Fuluri Dangriga Women's group in Belize have been grating cassava by hand all their lives. When they started a bread-making enterprise, they adopted the traditional method of hand-grating the cassava but found it was too slow to allow them to expand their productive capacity. Using available commercial grating services meant walking long distances with their cassava supplies and waiting their turn in line. So they found a funding agency willing to loan them the BZ\$500 they needed for a simple, mechanized grater.

The machine has had unexpected results, good and bad: the women have learned to run their business profitably, are planting more cassava since they can process more of it (increasing the country's food supply), have gained respect, and have earned the income they were seeking; but the cassava grater disrupted a traditional sociability that once surrounded cassava grating by hand, and it has led to a greater division of labor in the enterprise. Economic success may lead to changes in village class structure. The Lu Fuluri Dangriga group is the only women's organization that owns such a machine and produces cassava flour collectively.

A JAKARTA HOUSEHOLD

Thirteen men and two women share a household in Jakarta, which is both a boarding house and the site of a small business. Such a household is called a *pondok*. This particular *pondok* is owned and managed by a woman named Ibu Mus. The loft of her tiny shack serves as a sleeping platform for the whole household, and the ground floor is their storage, working, cooking, eating, and bathing area. This *pondok*'s central enterprise is ice-cream making and selling, but it could be engaged in making any of the many foods that are sold on the streets of Jakarta. Ibu Mus buys all the materials for making ice cream and sells it to ten of the men, who are the actual ice-cream makers and vendors. The men also rent their vending carts from Ibu Mus. Since ice cream is, of course, perishable, each worker must stay on the streets until what he has made each day is sold. Each worker buys two meals a day from Ibu Mus, although they do not pay her any rent.

Other people in the household also have their allotted tasks. For Ibu Mus herself the day is long and arduous. She shops for the evening meal once a day, which she prepares. She also buys herbal remedies in the market, which she prepares and sells. On her route she sells batik cloth made in her rural village and collects old clothes, which she will sell back in the village when she goes there. She also lends money at 30% interest, and part of her daily rounds is taken up collecting on the money she has loaned. Her brother-in-law's wife shops in the morning and prepares the *pondok*'s morning meal; as she cooks breakfast, she prepares the fried food she will hawk from a tray on her head near one of the government buildings. Ibu



UNICEF PHOTO BY LING

Mus's husband has the responsibility of keeping the ice-cream pushcarts and the house in repair; he has helped the collective business by constructing a device that makes ice-cream cones. Her husband's son-in-law (her husband has another wife in the village) operates this machine during the day, when everyone has cleared out of their small quarters. Two other members of the household work at regular waged work—one is a driver and one is a waiter. Their incomes are lower than that of the ice-cream vendors, but they are steadier.

All these householders come from the same village outside Jakarta and are bound by ties of loyalty. These ties allow for the extension of credit from Ibu Mus to the workers and for the entrusting of money and valuables to each other when they are away or when they need such valuables taken to their relatives in the village. For everyone it is an exhausting day on the streets; then, a hard night, for the sleeping arrangements in the *pondok* are less than ideal. ■

Beekeeping Makes Women's Group Independent

The Kibwezi Women's Group of Machakos, Kenya was formed expressly to set up a honey-producing cooperative. Several small villages are involved in the group. The Kenyan Ministry of Agriculture introduced the women to an improved beehive that has saved them enough time to enter into other income-producing activities—raising poultry and goats, and brick making.

The Top Bar Hive improves on the traditional long, tree-hanging hives in several ways: first, it can be easily moved to exploit changing flowering times or to attract new swarms; then, it makes beekeeping simpler and safer; its improved smoker (used to calm the bees before removing the honey comb) yields better-tasting honey; and it can be constructed with homespun materials or purchased ready-made once the operation expands.

The women's group highly recommends beekeeping to other village cooperatives, considering the ready market for both honey and beeswax. They caution that improved transportation and distribution to urban areas is needed if a nationwide industry is to be created by village women.

Turning Surplus Fruits into Snacks for Sale

Pueblo a Pueblo, a small nonprofit foundation in Honduras, has set up cooperatives to process the fruits of the cashew tree, which often go to waste because they have an astringent flavor when eaten fresh. (The cashew nut grows at the end of this cashew apple.) Using a combined osmotic-solar method of drying fruits and vegetables, local women can prepare a date-like snack from the cashew apple for home consumption and outside sale. The bitter fruit is cooked in sugar, which begins the osmotic drying part of the process, and then sun-dried in a special solar dryer. Over 200 of these special dryers have been distributed by the foundation, bringing added income to 200 peasant families. The women are pleased with the technology because it is simple and does not demand a heavy commitment of their time.

The women can produce 15–20 pounds of the finished sweet each day. When the product is packaged, it has a 6–8 month shelf life, giving it good potential for sale. The dryer's simple design is made possible by a special, longer-lasting plastic—a successful transfer of sophisticated technology into the developing world.

THINKING POINTS

☞ In large parts of the world, the primary economic activity in the country is the production of food and drink.

☞ In East Africa, it's estimated that women work 16 hours a day. As well as doing most of the housework, they raise 60–80% of the population's food.

☞ A study in the Philippines found that families spent more money on food for boys than for girls.

☞ In Brazil, female-headed households increased 200% from 1960–70.

☞ In Nigeria, urbanization has brought increased seclusion for Moslem Hausa women. Men are under no cultural obligation to pass the proceeds of the increased productivity stemming from development capital aid along to wives or other female relatives. Aid cannot be assumed to aid all family members equally.

☞ Married women with children work more hours than married men. In Java, men work 2½ fewer hours than their wives.

☞ Many governments encourage monoculture and cash cropping to earn foreign exchange. Consequently, more and more kinds of foodstuffs must be imported.

☞ Nutritional needs are increased by the parasitic infestations endemic in the developing world. For example, hookworm infections increase the body's need to consume iron, a mineral often in short supply in protein-poor diets. In New Guinea, the gardens have heavy hookworm infestations; thus, women, who spend the most time in the gardens, suffer greater infestations than men. This complicates the women's state of health, considering their recognized need for more iron than men.

☞ 30% of the labor in food manufacturing is in handling the material.

☞ In Africa, women supply 85% of the labor of food processing and storage.

☞ In Egypt, cottonseed oil is the country's basic oil. Cotton is one of its basic exports. Waste not, want not.

☞ Worldwide, the grain eaten by meat animals is rising twice as fast as grain eaten by people.

☞ The Irish suffered in the 18th century when the British forced small farmers off the land so the encroaching British landowners could rear cattle and pigs for cheap salt meat for British army. Central American peasants today have been forced out by agribusinesses raising cattle for cheap hamburgers.

☞ Testimony before Congress during the Depression: "The farmers are being pauperized by the poverty of industrial populations, and the industrial population is being pauperized by the poverty of farmers." Not a unique situation.

☞ Ethiopia's program of land reform encourages peasant possession. The land is designated for family units, and, in a patriarchal culture, this has made women more dependent on men. In polygamous areas, only one wife is registered with husband as land holder, meaning the younger co-wives have lost all rights.

☞ As the price of sugar collapsed in the world market, Filippino plantation owners took over their workers' small farm plots to grow more sugar to offset the lower price. They also decreased wages. Thus, they forced families now earning even less money than before to have to buy vegetables they once grew for themselves—and the vegetables cost more because the sugar workers were no longer selling the surpluses of their small plots in local markets.

☞ The FAO estimated in 1978 that 40% of the world's food harvest went to waste, claimed by insects, rodents, insufficient processing facilities, lack of transport, and inadequate training.

☞ Women agricultural advisers make up only 8.5% of such experts in Latin America, 2.9% in Africa, and .7% in Asia (and what percent here?).

☞ The Fijian government started a cocoa processing factory on the island, run by village men. The men, although they had chainsaws and trucks at their disposal, used firewood near the village to fuel the factory. The women now have to walk a mile on foot to gather wood for cooking.


Community Wide Project Changes Women's Lives

Cheese-making in Chawirapampa, Bolivia, was formerly a traditional home industry, overseen by women. The quality of the cheese varied, however, and what little the women sold outside the home went at such a low price that the sale barely covered the cost of the milk and their hours of labor.

The Appropriate Technology for Rural Women Project has successfully hooked together several development agencies to set up a communal cheese factory in the village. One agency investigated the possible market in nearby La Paz and what price the village could charge, another helped design the factory, and the agricultural ministry trained the people in improved cattle raising techniques. The village organized its own committees to run the enterprise, and the women have assumed chief responsibility for day-to-day manufacture.

The women have gained status and self-confidence from their participation in the factory's management, in a society that most often allows women little public stature. The time they once spent making cheese can now be devoted to other productive purposes without depriving their families of fresh cheese. The more scientific process possible in a larger-scale production mode has improved the quality of the cheese and increased the quantity made. And the community now has a growing community fund from the profits of the venture.

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Food and children had been the things that had bonded women across cultures, she had been taught. She was, after all, a gringa in the kitchen—it was January in

Managua, Nicaragua, and very hot.

Together with the women she

was making a dinner; beans, rice and vegetables served in big leaves. In her broken Spanish, for some reason she could not fathom, she began to talk about pie fights. The other women looked up, surprised, disgusted with the idea. How could anyone in their right mind throw food around?

These gringos—she saw them shake their heads—sympathetic or not, these gringos.

Art

For Mary Scott this is her big moment in the picture. Hollywood contrives the pies so that only dignity is injured.

World Wide

FOOD POLITICS POWER

A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE
BY CHARLOTTE BUNCH

Charlotte Bunch is a feminist writer, organizer, and speaker. She has been an activist since the 1960s and presently works on issues of global feminism.

This is taken from a speech given at the Pacific Regional Women and Food Conference in Sydney, Australia in February, 1982.

FEMINISM, in this wave, began with the assertion that the personal is political as a means of uncovering injustices previously considered private and non-political. Through this concept, we came to understand sexual politics—that the relations between the sexes involve issues of power and control, issues of economic and social policy.

Similarly, our first assertion in discussing feminist perspectives on food must be that food is political. The issues of how food is produced, prepared, and distributed are matters of political control and economic power that must be taken out of the realm of the private and exposed to the scrutiny of political analysis. On the global level, Susan George has effectively documented in *How the Other Half Dies* that political and economic decisions, not a shortage of resources, cause world hunger. Food is also a matter of government priorities. This is clearly demonstrated by the calculation that money spent on the military in all countries in one day would be enough to provide basic food, clothing, and shelter for all the people in the world for one year.

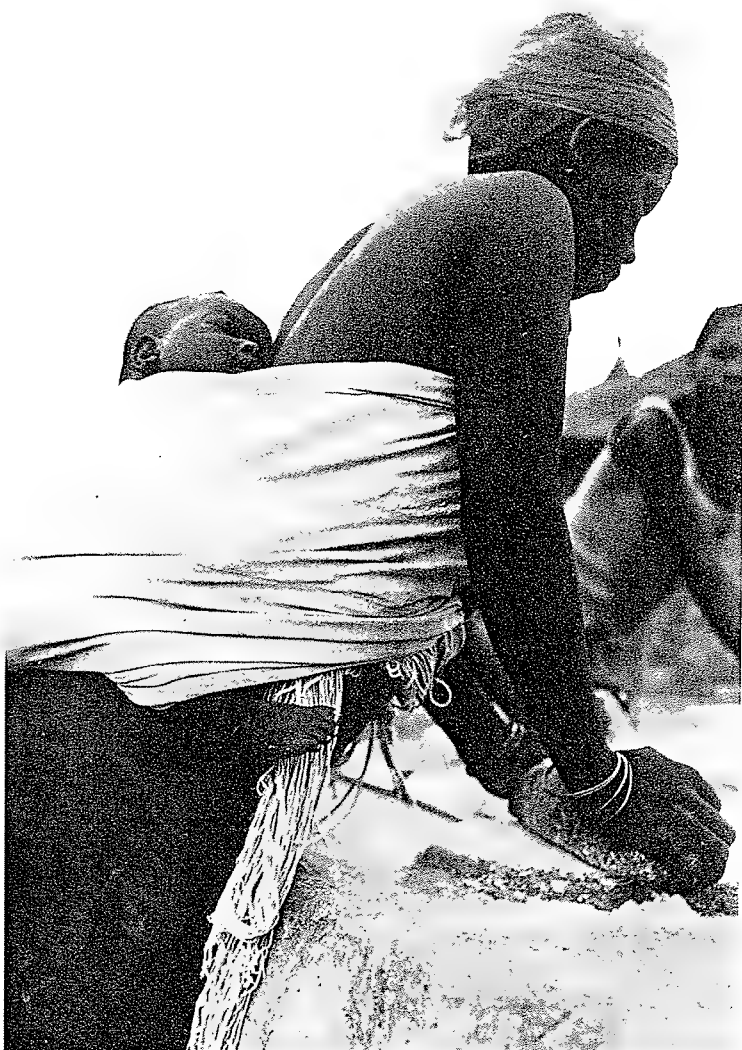
Food and the withholding of food are political weapons that governments use internationally to get other nations to agree with their policies, and internally to exercise control over their own people. This is seen dramatically in times of war and famine when political considerations determine who gets relief. It is also clear in the aid policies of most industrialized countries of both the East and the West. But food is also used in less obvious ways that affect the everyday lives of women. For example, many women are trapped in destructive marriages because of economic and cultural practices that would deny them and their children the food to survive if they were on their own.

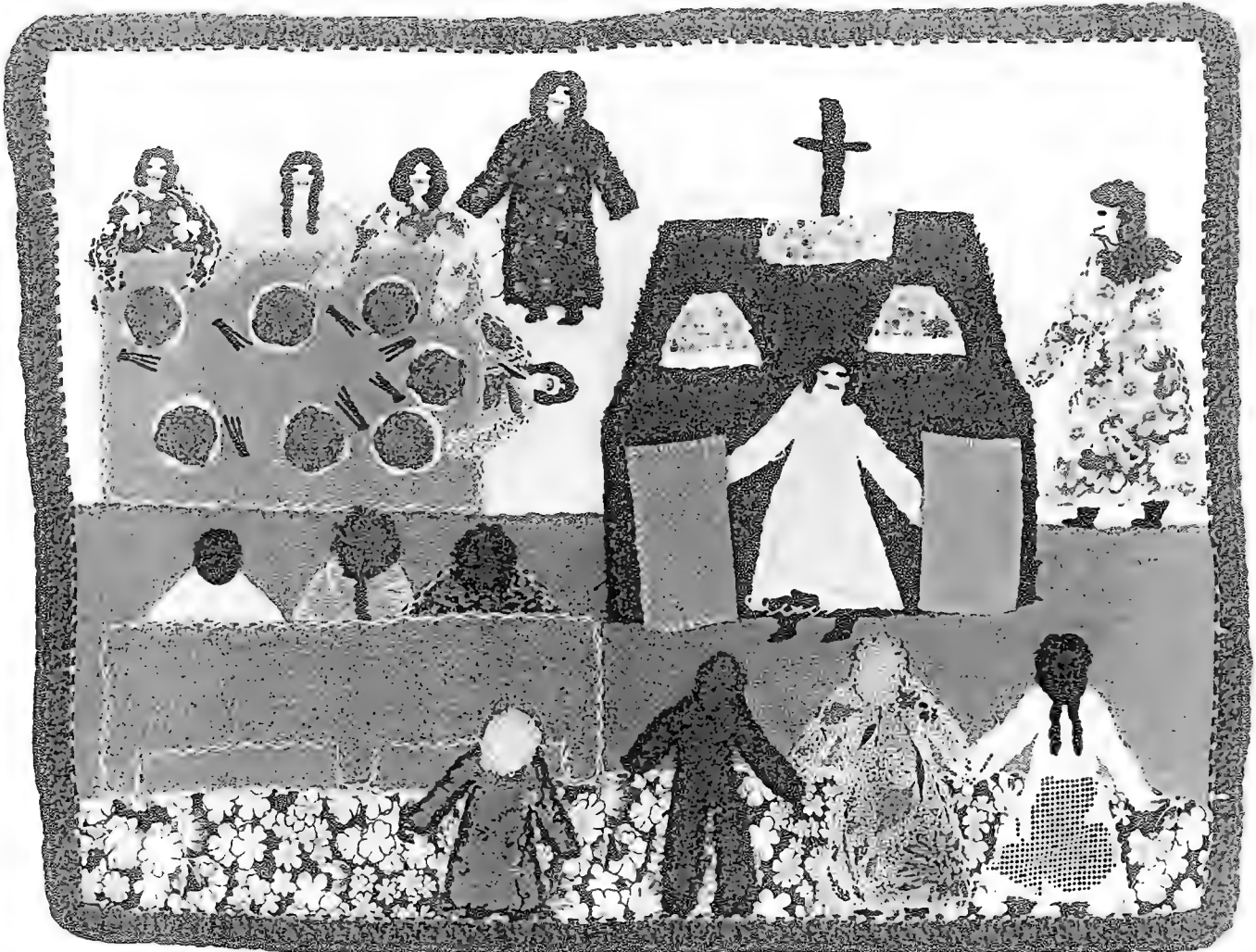
Even in so-called "developed" countries like the United States, the gap between rich and poor is widening: women and children make up an increasing percentage of the underfed everywhere. The right wing advocates "pro-family" policies, consciously based on denying economic resources to women who step out of line, or simply do not fit into their view of the middle-class, heterosexual, nuclear family unit. George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty* (considered by some to be Reagan's economic bible) spells out why government should not adopt policies that result in more income through welfare or jobs for women—especially for Black female heads of households—because it increases their independence and thus undermines the patriarchal family.

On the personal level, food is a factor in controlling women's bodies and in assuring continued service to the family. Susie Orbach, in *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, observes how women's obsession with diet and thinness contributes to negative self-concepts and the struggle to meet external male standards for our bodies. The constant demand on women to prepare the correct food for their families and the guilt associated with the idea that any food problems are the mother's fault play a role in women's oppression as well. Further, throughout the world, when there is not enough to eat, men and boy children get priority within the family, and females, therefore, constitute a disproportionate number of the malnourished.

Food is used as a weapon in the home as well as in international politics. And it is a potent and deadly one. Yet women,

Disadvantaged women worldwide are locked into a lifestyle of exploitation. The Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women, established in 1975, is trying to improve their lot through projects implemented on a village level, such as providing fuel-efficient wood stoves for cooking.





HELIAS FOUNDATION

Making arpilleras, pieced and embroidered scenes of everyday life in poor neighborhoods of Chile, gives the women who make them a vehicle for self-expression as well as some extra money. (Arpilleras are available here from the Helias Foundation, an organization that promotes human rights through the medium of art.) The message in the pocket sewn onto the back of this arpilleras reads: "This soup kitchen for children depends upon the Church because the children's parents are out of work. They don't have the means to give them a plate of food." [Helias Foundation for Art & Human Rights, 405 Lincoln Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94301.]

who are on the most intimate terms with food as its producers, purchasers, and preparers, have almost no say over food policies at any level—local, national, or global. Women must move from food preparation to food policy. We must bring feminism to bear as a perspective in examining the issues of food. As a movement of activists, we must struggle for changes in food policies based on feminist perspectives.

In the 1980s, feminists must expand our movement's horizons and address all kinds of issues of human life from a feminist perspective. At an international feminist workshop in Bangkok, Thailand in 1979, a small group of women from diverse regions of the world worked to establish some common goals for feminism that could be seen as global. We agreed upon two inseparable aspects of feminism: 1) the achievement of each individual woman's equality, dignity, and freedom of choice through her power to control her own life and body within and outside the home; and 2) the achievement of social transformation that would end the domination of any group by another through the creation of a just social and economic order.

Around the issues of food production, preparation, and distribution, these two goals clearly come together. There is not a more crucial area of control over our bodies than that of control over the food put into them. Food determines both our ability to survive and the quality of that survival. Yet we

cannot entirely control our individual consumption of food because it is so connected to society's food policies. Given the intimate relation of women to food, I only wonder why it has taken us so long to focus on this issue.

In the industrialized countries, groups have questioned the safety and healthiness of the food we consume. But we must also look at the issue of food in a global context. Redistribution of world food resources and relocation of government priorities are a must. The exploitation of the world's resources by a few—at the expense of the many—and the withholding of food for political purposes or economic profit must be challenged. Feminists must analyze agribusiness and multinational corporations in order to create alternative policies for food production and distribution. We need to think of new approaches to the issue, such as preparing national budgets that would demonstrate how allocations would differ if priority shifted away from the military and toward the meeting of human needs.

In this process, we must question what has come to be viewed in the U.S. as an appropriate (and even desirable) standard of living—one that is based on wasteful consumption and destruction of the world's resources. American patterns need to be changed at the level of social production, mass consumption, and advertising. A new food policy cannot be achieved simply through individuals having enough money to



UN PHOTO 151,969/LOUISE GUBB

As part of the relief effort in the drought-stricken regions of Ethiopia, the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women has joined forces with the Ethiopian Nutrition Institute to teach women in those areas how to make the best use of relief food supplies from abroad and produce their own food through gardening and poultry raising.

buy "health food" or going back to the land, where earth mothers again end up doing all the work from scratch.

In questioning the American standard of living, we must seek to replace it with a vision of a higher quality of living. Given the poisons in our food, water, and air, it would be hard to claim that industrial development in the West has led to quality development. Our culture has emphasized the quantity of goods at the expense of quality and safety, just as business has sought profits even at the expense of life. It will not be easy to change these patterns, and feminists must not romanticize pre-industrial cultures as the solution. Rather, we must examine what has been both useful and problematic in capitalist and socialist industrialization, as well as in agricultural societies, in order to find new approaches for the future.

In this complex task of re-defining the quality of life and looking for ways to meet the world's needs more equitably, there is no better place to start than with issues of food production, preparation, purchasing, distribution, and consumption. If we can find feminist approaches to these food issues, we will have created a necessary cornerstone for any social transformation that could lead to world peace with equity and justice for all. ●



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Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature

Volume 6, Number 1, Spring 1987

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Kristina Straub on Anne Killigrew and
Alexander Pope

Ruth D. Weston on Cynthia Asquith
Marie-Claire Vallois on Madame de Staël
Plus other articles, review essays, and book
reviews.

Number 2, Fall 1987

"As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no
country. As a woman my country is the whole world."

Virginia Woolf's statement in *Three Guineas* is the
inspiration for a special issue of *Tulsa Studies* guest
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Pennsylvania. The issue will contain articles centered on
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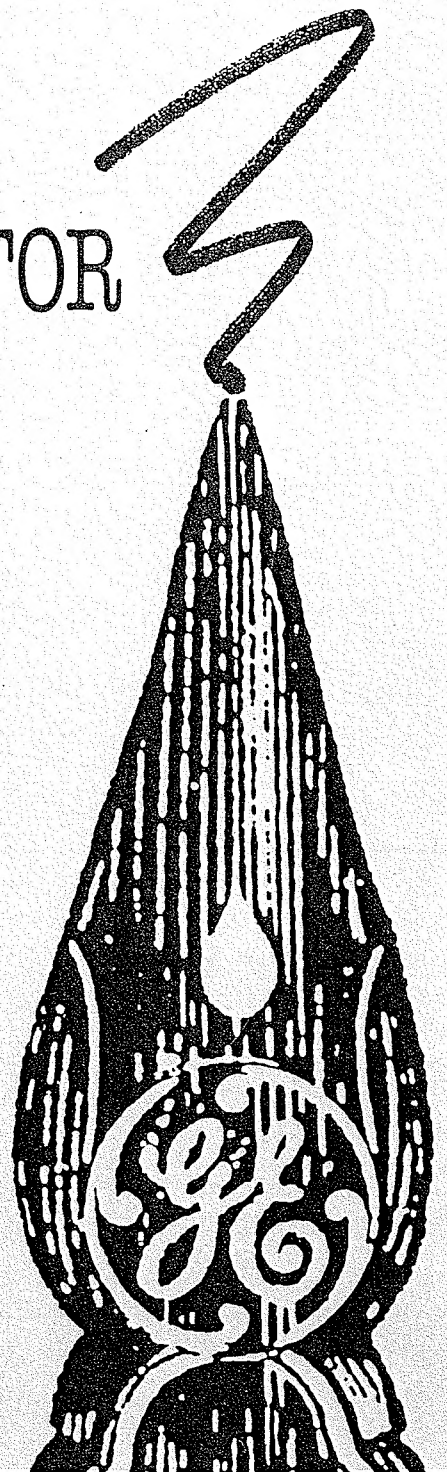
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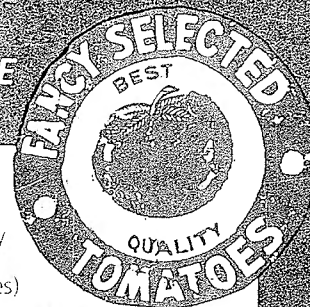
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A woman's relationship to her body and food is a paradigm for the use and control of food in the world.

Since a woman's individual power to control her own conditions of life has been taken from her,

issues of feeding and nurturing have moved out of the personal, and into the political realm.